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BOOK REVIEW

Seeing the Better City: How to Explore, Observe, and Improve Urban Space

Cities in Transition

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EDITORS' NOTE

Impact and Policy Research Review (IPRR)

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Right from its inception in 2022, the IMPACT AND POLICY RESEARCH REVIEW (IPRR) has aimed to promote scientific research for broadening the understanding of the processes of development. The articles use a blend of theory and data analysis to understand the prospects and challenges of developmental issues from an economic, political, and sociological perspective. In the current issue, attempts have been made to highlight and address the challenges thrown up by COVID-19, several of which have impacted the goal of sustainable and inclusive development in India with implications for other developing countries bearing the brunt of COVID-19.

The development discourses are ripe with the evidence of exclusionary policies oblivious to the needs and priorities of women and therefore, their disproportionate burdens, especially following the onset of COVID-19. Three articles address the women-centric disparate issues including the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and sexual harassment. The 'Young Voice' sections, apart from delving deep into these developmental challenges, also evaluate the rhetoric of current government policies. The 'Book Review' sections enrich our understanding of the complexities of urban policy-making in India with implications for sustainable and inclusive urban development. Overall, the current issue is a collection of interdisciplinary contributions. The articles offer useful as well as critical perspectives on developmental challenges. They further suggest plausible policy-making options to address these challenges. We hope the readers benefit from the articles in their quest to engage in debates on the development necessary for securing a sustainable future.

We thank the Journal Advisory Board and Editorial Review Committee for their enthusiastic support of the journal. We congratulate the authors for their insightful and well-researched articles. We also congratulate the IPRR Secretariat for their hard work and for setting solid foundations of high editorial standards for the journal.

With Gratitude,
Editors,
Impact and Policy Research Review (IPRR)

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Workplace Sexual Harassment: *New Variants through the Pandemic*

Priya Varadarajan¹

Abstract

And you thought that I don't have to meet that male colleague anymore, I don't need to travel with my boss anymore, I can stay away from the bus commute - I'm Safe! Are you kidding me?! And you thought it was only the Covid-19 virus that could mutate itself, that could have many variants, and could change with changing times? Think again! Unofficial data reveals that workplace sexism, harassment, discrimination, bullying, and sexual offenses have been the way of life for close to 90% of women in India, only less than a third of them even talk about it and a fraction of them report it (primary research conducted by Durga India). Yet, in India, we have the most powerful, holistic, and well-thought-through feminist laws against workplace harassment (POSH Act of 2013). It all does not add up.

Keywords: Pandemic; COVID-19; Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment is an issue that girls are familiar with and experience from the time they start understanding things. They normalize it, as a recurring feature or worse still blame themselves for it - "perhaps it's my dress", "I think I should not wear red lipstick", "I guess when I laughed too much he felt I was keen on him" and the list goes on. Open forums and honest conversations about this have always failed or never taken place. It's honestly a waste of time to discuss what happens to us, all the time, especially when we know we can avoid it altogether! Avoid it how? I can dress modestly from head to toe, I can stop talking to boys altogether, I should stay home late evenings, I won't party, I will stay away from the internet, I will work close to home or study a course that's in my town alone...the list goes on.

The issue has also been normalized by us to a large extent. How many times have parents sat with children and discussed the issue of everyday forms of harassment and sexual violence? Mothers largely worry for their daughters and tell them to dress modestly, cover their chest and not look up at a possible perpetrator. Girls are also told to bear the shame and not talk about it. In some sense, girls are made to believe that they asked for it, it's their mistake, it's an inter-generational problem, and that nothing can be done about it. In such a scenario, how will one even begin to think of solutions? Where are safe spaces to talk about this problem?

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Sexual harassment at the workplace eats into our lives, our thinking, our being, and our rights altogether. Imagine a man who is employed in an organization, and is preparing for a life-changing presentation. What will he do? He will prepare for the presentation all through the week, get dressed, and make the presentation to the best ability. Now, let's explore what a woman employee will do in his place. She first needed to prove herself on the double to even be eligible to make it to the same presentation, will prepare for the presentation, think about her clothes for the day, ensure the dress is not short, and her cleavage is not seen, prepares meals for her family at home, takes a transport that's safe, leaves home earlier for it, makes the presentation and gets interrupted by the men a million times during the presentation! Sexism, discrimination, harassment, mansplaining... you name it and they experience it!

So come the pandemic, the women sighed with relief that they can be at home (work from home Baba!), take calls and meetings and for once feel like their men counterparts - visible for performance and invisible for commodification! That remained only a distant dream. At Durga (www.durgaindia.org) we have had many women reach out to us to mitigate workplace harassment at their homes. Managers insist that the women employees keep their cameras switched on at all times. Managers make comments about the decor of the house, even asking if they are sitting on their beds or chairs. A manager even went on to ask the woman employee to wear lipstick so that he can experience the same professionalism if she were at the office! Seriously?! Has any manager ever worried about the looks and dress of the men team members this much? Why not? "That blue tie is what you should wear for all the team meetings, as it oozes reliability"! Try saying that the next time.

Sexual comments have started flooding WhatsApp, personal email accounts, and other forms of digital communication channels too. Young girls have been bombarded with friend requests, trolling, and lewd comments, making online spaces a nightmare. One of the girls at a Durga Safety workshop described it as "a nightmare to even live". Imagine the trauma she must be experiencing to say this.

The work timings have also extended beyond any normal hours we had experienced before. It anyway works from home, so meetings start in the wee hours and goes on through late nights. Women employees have been constantly chided to say "as a woman will you be able to attend this" and even some meeting opportunities with global clients have been taken away and offered on a plate for their men counterparts!

Like the workplace, as if sexual offenses were not enough sexism has taken another form too. Women are being asked to work different hours as they are now to cook and clean at home too and hence will not be considered productive at regular office hours. The downsizing weapon has been used one too many times on women and more women have lost jobs in the last couple of years. I recognize that men have lost jobs too, but the odds of women coming back to work are far bleaker in the near future.

The redressal committees and the ways to raise complaints have not been able to meet the demands. The committees in a way have also been a burden on the women. They are already bombarded with work and then the number of cases piling up is not helping at all. Also, because of the inability to clearly categorize the forms of harassment, the stigma associated with it, and the perpetual doubts women have on the issue, not many have been able to find any relief on issues they have faced. Women have also been silenced by managers saying that the world is suffering and

the organization is struggling. It was already felt that maternity leave, menstrual leave, and the icing on the cake the “me too” movement have all come in the way of increasing women hires in the organization. On one end it has become a joke for the HR team and the men that, why to hire women and get into issues, and on the other, it has reduced the chances of women getting into a level-playing field for women in general. In fact, there have been anecdotes of men commenting that they will refrain from hiring more women lest they slap a “me too” case of them. It's all a big joke!

If we now move to the informal workspaces from the formal ones, it's another hell hole there. Garment factories (most of them being unregistered) have done away with their women's teams since March 2020 itself. These women have not been paid for the last month of work too. Because of the lack of childcare facilities for most working mothers and schools remaining shut through the period, women have had limited support for childcare and hence have had to quit work too. Age being a limiting factor, many women post 35 years of age have also lost jobs at garment houses, as they are not considered productive enough.

The life and workspaces of domestic help are full of perpetual harassment and exploitation. They work in our homes and for you and I, yes. No paid leave, no social security, no health benefits, exploitative work timings, the penalty for not being to work during the lockdowns, and the custodian of all our frustrations at our own workplaces! What a life! And then no benefits of working from home too!

One of the issues that have not been given any importance is that of the mental health of people, particularly of working women. Lack of safe spaces to share, intense work at home and at the office, additional burdens of job losses, men folk staying home, the burden of losing jobs, and children staying home have all fallen on the lives of women. Women have also been the crusaders of health response at home, the first to respond to the health needs of the family and the last to get health support too.

The variants keep coming now and then, both the pandemic as well as patriarchy. We have vaccinations and boosters for one, we have our own will, strength, and resilience for the other. What we must have for the latter perhaps is impatience, annoyance, and frustration, so we give it up and give it back!

Policy Perspectives

A Local Chronicle of the Smart City Enterprise: *Case Study of New Town Kolkata, West Bengal, India*

Joy Karmakar¹

Abstract

The Smart City Mission (SCM) in India is one of the highly publicized projects that focus on the 'digital transformation' of cities and towns across India. However, policy analysts and scholars have raised questions and concerns regarding such a transformation. The question is whether the SCM fulfills the pressing needs of towns and cities or not. New Town Kolkata is one of the cities in West Bengal which initially adopted the SCM but later rejected the program. They adopted a new state-funded project called Green City Mission. Within this context, it tries to focus on the shortcomings of the SCM and how cities in a peri-urban interface like New Town Kolkata are transformed and encounter different challenges. In addition, this paper also analyzes the newly announced Green City Mission of West Bengal and tried to understand the differences and similarities between both projects. The paper reveals that such projects failed to create employment opportunities not only for the people of the town but also for the people of the surrounding villages.

Keywords: Smart City Mission; Green City; Digital Transformation

Introduction

It is almost eight years since the SCM in India was introduced. Many cities participated in the Mission, but some cities withdrew their application after a few rounds of the selection process. Four cities in West Bengal had participated up to the second round of selection but withdrew their candidature soon after. The State administration has rejected the Centre's 'Smart City Project,' opting instead to create a number of cities under its own 'Green City Project'. New Town Rajarhat, a Kolkata suburb that also was a part of the Centre's Smart City Project, will now be developed as India's first 'Green City'.

A smart city plan for individual cities in West Bengal was made based on citizen interaction, suggestions, and public opinion. It is noticed that there is no unanimous vision for the proposed smart city because each city represents a different character altogether, so the requirements have to be different. Some terminologies used in

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the visions have broader connotations, like 'sustainability' and 'smart', while some are very specific. It is important to note that the proposed smart city of Bidhannagar wants to attract a “new creative class” (Karmakar, Chatterjee, and Basu, 2017). It raises some crucial questions like who is the “new creative class”; what will happen to those who are not in the purview of the so-called 'new creative class'? The other concerns include whether it will create a barrier to the migration of traditionally skilled people and whether it will be inclusive.

Within this context, this paper tries to focus on the shortcomings of the Smart City Mission and how cities in a peri-urban interface like New Town Kolkata are transformed and encounter different challenges. In addition, this paper also analyzes the newly announced Green City Mission of West Bengal and tried to understand the differences and similarities between both projects. To analyze the paper, several official documents are used, including the land use plan of New Town Kolkata, environmental impact assessment plan, concept plan of New Town Kolkata, smart city project proposal, green city mission plan, etc. Socio-economic census data from 2011 and ESRI image 2020 are also used.

After the introductory section, the following section identifies some concerns and challenges of the Smart City Mission. The third section explores the transformation of New Town Kolkata and its challenges. The fourth section analytically discusses the Green City Mission and its similarities and differences with the Smart City Mission. Thereafter, a conclusion was made based on the above findings.

Concerns and Challenges of the Smart City Mission (SCM) in India

After the announcement of Smart City Mission (SCM) as a nationwide project in December 2014, policy experts argued that the project in its present form will promote skewed development rather than a comprehensive as well as inclusive urban future (Srinivasan, 2015). It came as part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative to capture the public imagination and as a continuation of the 'Gujarat Model' of development. The new scheme is focused on promoting not only new satellite towns but also modernizing existing cities.

The scheme would include upgrading social, institutional, and health infrastructure in existing cities. Moreover, it is a direct effort to reduce the pressure on metro cities and its 'solution' initiatives are based on technology. It is because the current government noted in its manifesto that “our cities should no longer remain a reflection of poverty and bottlenecks. Rather, they should become symbols of *efficiency, speed, and scale*”. However, it may sound vague, but initially, the scheme was able to capture the imagination of the public and projected the narrative of 100 new (smart) cities onto public perception (CFA, 2019).

Critics noted that the last seven years of the SCM implementation has been usually dubious, fragmented and at best chequered. Smart cities have been separated from the reality and needs of people's lives and have finally been packed with "development" rhetoric. Moreover, it is argued the concept of smart cities in

the Indian context is vague enough to overcome regional and regional differences and can be broadly described as a tool for considering cities as "more competitive". The lack of fixed meaning using catchphrases such as inclusivity and sustainability has made it possible to convey SCM as a human-friendly reform scheme.

Many urban experts doubt whether the initiative is addressing the real problems facing too many people in India's cities or not. It is noticed that the "Smart" city proposal offers a variety of technical solutions for better cities, but cannot outline a comprehensive vision that takes into account the lack of basic services in many Indian cities. It fails a lot in that respect. In fact, experts also opine that a large part of our urban population is living in really dismal conditions, without basic services and smart city proposals fail to address that (Chatterjee, 2017; Chaudhry, 2017).

It is also highlighted that the Smart Cities Mission for promoting greater urbanization but fails to address structural causes of migration: an agrarian crisis, drought and floods, a lack of jobs in rural areas and failed land reform. Scholars also highlighted that people must be the focus of government intervention instead of technology. Technology development is very important and can bring about positive changes, but they should be based on an integrated approach rather than an apparently exclusive platform.

The SCM requires each city to create a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) under the Companies Act 2013. This is a limited liability company that manages the implementation of mission-based projects. This SPV plans, evaluates, approves, and releases funding to further implement, manage, operate, monitor, and evaluate smart city development projects in the cities involved (Kummitha, 2019). Due to the lack of know-how and resources in the existing urban local bodies (ULBs), it is possible under an alibi to ensure the implementation of the program.

Therefore, SPVs are given tremendous power under the SCM, which was originally (constitutionally) the "rights and obligations" of the local municipality. The SPV, which is clearly harmless and even said to be useful to the city's administration, is in direct conflict with the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, which transfers planning and management functions to ULB. Ambiguous relationships between elected institutions and SPVs further complicate matters, as SPVs are usually run by state-level officials who run the show (Sandhir, 2016). This is the exact opposite of the SCM's goal of "strengthening local governments". So, the next section tries to capture the transformation of New Town Kolkata and the non-adherence of SCM.

1.1 Shifts from Smart to Green City Mission: Case of New Town Kolkata

New Town Kolkata is a planned newly developed satellite city on the north-eastern fringes of Kolkata. The city is 13 years old, being born with the enactment of the New Town Kolkata Development Authority (NKDA) Act in 2009. The township project was officially announced by the government of West Bengal on the 1st of June 1995. To accommodate the population growth in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA), the State Government conceived the development of the New Town Project at Rajarhat

(NTP) in the early nineties to provide land for the construction of houses for a population of 7.50 lakh for all income groups with emphasis on housing for economically weaker sections and lower income groups as well as developing a new Business Centre.

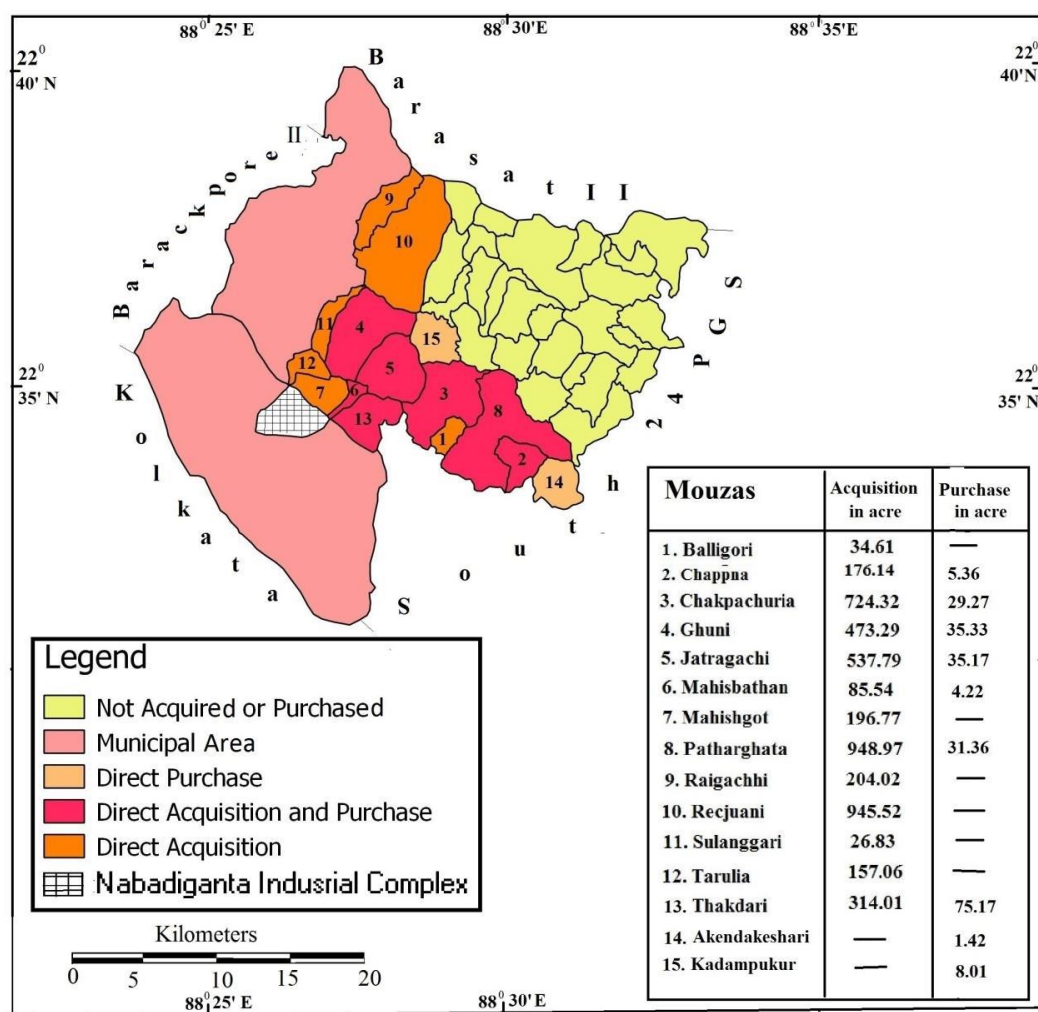
After the announcement of the Smart City Mission in 2014, the state government submitted a proposal to the center to declare New Town Kolkata as a 'smart green city'. For this purpose, NKDA submitted a 16-point initiative including a vehicle-tracking system for solid waste management. It is also worthwhile to remember that the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the center declared this town as a 'solar city' (Chakraborty, 2014).

The vision statement for the smart city project of New Town Kolkata highlights that "New Town Kolkata - a future-ready global services hub attracting the best talent with a fine work-life balance" (Ministry of Urban Development, 2016). It is apparent that New Town Kolkata is projected as a global business center to attract global capital and compete with other cities. Citizen feedback reveals that walkability and transport are the main areas of intervention, followed by safety and security, the economy, and employment and water. The lack of adequate job opportunities for the residents or future property owners of New Town Kolkata is one of the main issues highlighted by the citizens.

New Town Kolkata is one of the eastern peri-urban planned towns where villages along the boundary still exist since only agricultural land has been acquired for this project. This paper analyzes the socio-economic condition of those villages and settlements existing in and along the boundary of the 'smart city' New Town Kolkata. It also takes into account the life of the people living in those spaces. Socio-economic census data has been used for the analysis as well as some case studies presented to show the reality of the people living in and around the so-called 'smart city'.

From the overview of the above Figure 1 below, it is evident that land procured for the project was in two ways, i.e., direct acquiring and purchase from the land owner. It is relevant here because this town is at its inception stage and the Smart City Mission projected the mission as 'inclusive'. Therefore, a narrative of inclusivity can be easily caught through the lens of different stakeholders living in and around this so-called smart space. These mouzas are under the jurisdiction of four Gram Panchayats, namely Chandpur, Jangrahatiara-II, Patharghata, and Rajarhat-Bishnupur II. There are a total of 32 villages under these three Gram Panchayats. Out of 32 villages, the land was procured from 15 villages. People of these villages have given their agricultural land for the development of the township project.

Figure 1: New Town Kolkata land procurement and its surrounding space



1.3.1 Socio-Economic Transformation and its Implications

Economic and social changes in the second half of the 20th century transformed the nature of the countryside. Aspects such as peri-urbanization, peri-urban agriculture, urban expansion, and associated areas, and environmental transformation become fundamental in urban studies. Due to such transformation, peri-urban people are encountering a complex situation because of the degradation of their activity and the transformation of their peasant condition. This is one face of the *New Rurality* characterized by the unequal access and use of urban-rural peripheral spaces (Ávila-Sánchez, 2011).

Aguilar (2006) explains the process and timing of rapid changes in the peri-urban areas of a city compared to the other areas of the city. Huge constructions transform completely peripheral areas due to their magnitude: transport infrastructure, vast housing developments (formal and informal), the emergence of industrial sites, and corporate business management impact and change the use of large portions of agricultural land and its productive pattern. However, very few

papers investigate the socio-economic as well as environmental challenges encountered by the peri-urban area in the context of a smart city. This section of the paper argues that though there is a change in the peri-urban economy, the income and unequal access to material resources is remarkable.

The Indian socio-economic census 2011 has created four categories of households in rural and urban areas. These categories are based on some indicators² proposed mainly for different government schemes, like the National Social Assistance Program (NSAP). These categories excluded households, including households, deprived households, and zero-deprived households. From these categories, a glimpse of rural household status can be depicted. Villages in and around the New Town Kolkata can be looked at from this perspective. Figure 2 shows the different categories of households. Among the four Gram Panchayats, Jangrahatiara-II has the maximum number of households, followed by Rajarhat-Bishnupur II, Chandpur, and Patharghata, respectively.

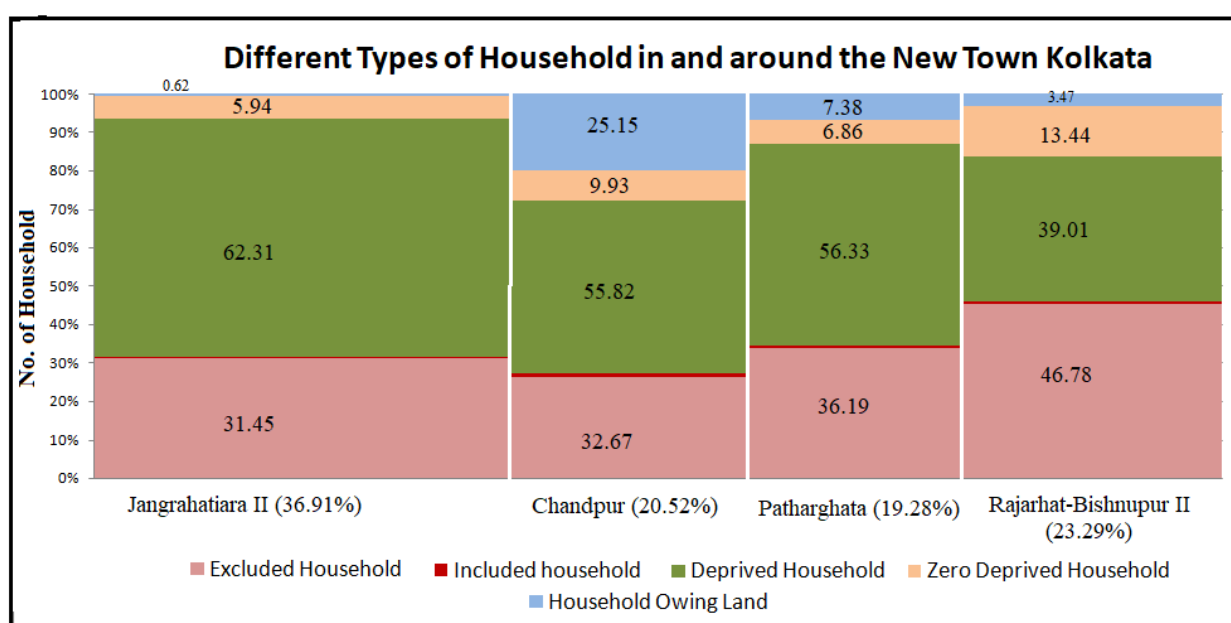


Figure 2: Types of Household In and around New Town Kolkata

Source: Socio-Economic and Caste Census, 2011

From the overview of Figure 2, it is apparent that there are a large number of households under the deprived category. Jangrahatiara II *Gram Panchayat* has more than 62% of households in the deprived group, followed by Patharghata (56.33%) and

² Households with only one room, *kuccha* walls and *kuccha* roof, no adult members between the ages of 16 to 59, Women headed households with no adult male members between 16 and 59, Household with disabled members and no able-bodied adult member, SC/ST households, Households with no literate adult above 25 years, Landless households depriving a major part of their income from manual casual labour. All these indicators are for deprived households. Non excluded household facing one or more deprivation; and households not reporting on any deprivation criteria but considered for deprivation (Zero Deprivation).

Chandpur (55.82%) while Rajarhat-Bishnupur II (39.01) Gram Panchayat has the lowest number of deprived category household. Jagrahatiara has 50.48% landless households and it is the highest among the four Gram Panchayat. Patharghata and Chandpur have 46.86% and 40.87% landless households, respectively. Rajarhat-Bishnupur II Gram Panchayat has 31.92% landless households. This implies that these landless households are deriving a major part of their income from manual casual labor in the smart city. Broadly, the main source of household income of these Gram Panchayats is categorized into seven types.

Table 1: Households Involved in Different Types of Activities

Types of work	Jangrahatiara-II	Chandpur	Pathargahata	Rajarhat-Bishnupur I
Cultivation	0.41	15.00	5.40	1.24
Manual Casual Labour	58.36	53.31	61.08	39.64
Part-time or Full-Time Domestic Service	3.08	2.52	3.38	4.75
Foraging Rag Picking	0.06	0.40	0.41	0.10
Non-agricultural Own Account Enterprise	3.52	2.31	5.81	9.44
Begging/Charity/ Alms collection	0.37	1.70	0.93	0.95
Others	34.20	24.75	23.00	43.87
Total Household	12135	6747	6339	7659

Source: Socio-Economic and Caste Census, 2011

From Table 1, it is very clear that most households are engaged in manual casual labor and very few households have been able to develop a non-agricultural own account enterprise. At Patharghata, the number of households engaged in manual casual labor is 61.08. In Jangrahatiara and Chandpur, the percentage of households engaged in manual casual labor is 58.36% and 53.31%, respectively.

In Rajarhat-Bishnupur II *Gram Panchayat*, the lowest number (39.64) of households engaged in manual casual labor. Households engaged in part-time or full-time domestic service range from 2.52% to 4.75%. This is because the township is still not fully populated as expected in the policy documents. Therefore, demand for domestic service is very low in the township. Apart from this, a large number of households engaged in other activities that are miscellaneous in character.

Descriptive statistics of economic activities further reveal several things about the nature of job availability and people's engagement in different jobs.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Labor Force Employed in Selected Activities

Economic Activities	Mean	SD	CV	Median	UQ	LQ	Minimal
Cultivation	46.84	58.89	125.71	25.50	59.00	5.75	2.00
Manual Casual Labour	549.59	583.21	106.12	383.50	665.75	215.00	79.00
Part-time or Full- Time Domestic Service	35.06	39.06	111.41	19.00	67.50	6.75	0.00
Foraging Rag Picking	2.13	3.27	153.89	0.50	2.50	0.00	0.00
Non-agricultural Own Account Enterprise	52.31	81.18	155.19	19.50	62.25	1.00	0.00
Begging/Charity/ Alms collection	9.13	7.41	81.24	7.00	12.25	5.00	0.00
Others	332.44	405.26	121.90	186.50	366.00	77.25	20.00

Source: Socio-Economic and Caste Census, 2011

The median values for all seven economic activities indicate the median occupational structure of all the villages in and around the township. Moreover, it also shows that the highest numbers of median workers are engaged in Manual Casual Labour. The minimal value for each economic activity is the smallest number of persons employed in that group in any village; it might be assumed that this is the minimal number of workers in each occupation group required to make a village viable.

Households' monthly income also reflects the economic conditions of the landscape. In Patharghata and Chandpur *Gram Panchayat*, more than 80% of households have a monthly income is less than Rupees 5000. In the case of Jangrahatiara II, more than 69% of household income is less than Rupees 5000 and in Rajarhat-Bishnupur I, more than 62% of households' income is less than Rupees 5000.

Table 2: Households' Monthly Income

<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	Less than Rs. 5,000	5,000 -10,000	More than Rs. 10,000
Jangrahatiara-II	69.54	18.61	11.84

Chandpur	82.15	13.07	4.77
Pathargahata	84.28	12.16	3.54
Rajarhat-Bishnupur I	62.64	23.18	14.16
Total Household	12135	6747	6339

Source: Socio-Economic and Caste Census, 2011

In Jangrahatiara-II and Rajarhat-Bishnupur I, more than 10% of households earn more than Rupees 10,000 monthly. In Chandpur and Pathargahata, only 4% and 3% of households earn more than Rupees 10,000 monthly, respectively. The above Table 2 clearly reflects that from the time of inception, it has failed to provide not only jobs but also adequate income to the people who live close to the ‘smart space’ despite the city being projected as a ‘global business center’. In addition, the persistence of cultivation and casual labor in agricultural fields in the peri-urban interface is an expression of the *New Rurality*, which reflects a territorial relationship between cities and their immediate rural surroundings.

One of the possible arguments for the lack of jobs and employability would be the lack of education, skill, and training of the village population. This can be seen through the following Table 4. Education is one of the essential components to being part of the smart city as the various solutions are ‘technology based’. Therefore, education is the utmost requirement.

Table 4: Educational Scenario of the Villages

Category	Jangrahatiara-II	Chandpur	Pathargahata	Rajarhat-Bishnupur I
Illiterate	19.92	22.16	25.83	17.06
Below Primary	14.34	7.53	13.70	9.69
Primary	25.78	28.73	26.73	20.84
Middle	20.24	25.83	19.96	24.93
Secondary	8.79	8.25	7.83	11.53
Higher Secondary	4.34	4.03	3.46	6.97
Graduate or Above	6.01	3.34	2.29	8.03

Other	0.57	0.14	0.20	0.95
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Source: Socio-Economic and Caste Census, 2011

From Table 4, it is evident that more than 80% of the population of each *Gram Panchayat* do not have secondary and above educational qualifications. This makes people incompetent for higher-paid jobs that are supposed to be available in the smart city. However, it is important to highlight that occupational diversification in the smart city is less, which is reflected in the occupational engagement of the people.

Therefore, a policy of territorial intervention is in and around cities in the context of diversity (with tertiary activities, productive, educational, and recreational or ecotourism and environmental protection) that minimizes the adverse effects of urbanization and consumption of urban agricultural products. Agriculture should be promoted. It is important, this activity, which deviates from traditional agriculture, needs to be integrated into the territorial public policy.

Its practice should be promoted as an alternative to poverty reduction and as a contribution to community development. Bellet and Llop (2000) identify four services that urban centers offer to their rural surroundings: (i) specialized goods and services; (ii) greater social, economic, and cultural interaction; (iii) links to infrastructure networks that connect local communities with regional, national, and international communities; and (iv) public and government administration services through which local demands and needs can be channeled.

Satterthwaite and Tacoli (2006) propose four functions that can contribute to the development of rural areas where small and medium-sized cities are closely related (a) as markets of agricultural products; (b) as production and distribution centers of goods and services; (c) as centers for non-agricultural rural job growth and its consolidation; and (d) as attraction centers for rural migrants. They also added that the contribution of these functions to socially inclusive growth depends on existing social and economic structures in both urban and rural environments, their power relations, and development strategies at the national level (Satterthwaite and Tacoli, 2006).

1.3.2 Ecological Concerns over Township Creation

This section throws light on the changing land uses and ecological consequences encountered by the people of Rajarhat and New Town in particular. Conversion of agricultural land into urban land did not only bring economic change but also brought paramount environmental change. The environmental change includes the vanishing of agriculture and wetland ecosystems as a substantial part of the *mouza* were under wetland and ecosystem. Ecosystem services that the villagers used are at stake now. Not only has the acquired land been transformed, but the area which is not acquired is also transformed for the development of housing enclaves. Dhar et al. (2019)

studied the land surface temperature change due to changes in the land use in the Rajarhat block under which New Town Kolkata and surrounding villages are located.

They find out that from 1990 to 2016: 13 km² of vegetation cover was lost due to urbanization; 9.3 km² of open land was converted to agricultural land and open fields/parks; 1.4 km² of aquaculture ponds was converted to tree cover/scrublands, and 1.45 km² of lakes/ponds filled up. Furthermore, due to this change in land-use pattern over 26 years, LST has increased by 0.94°C. The urban-heat-island (UHI) phenomenon has also increased. In the following map in Figure 3, it is clear that there are still a few patches of agricultural land that exist outside the smart city of New Town Kolkata. Likewise, only a few artificially created large water bodies exist within the township.

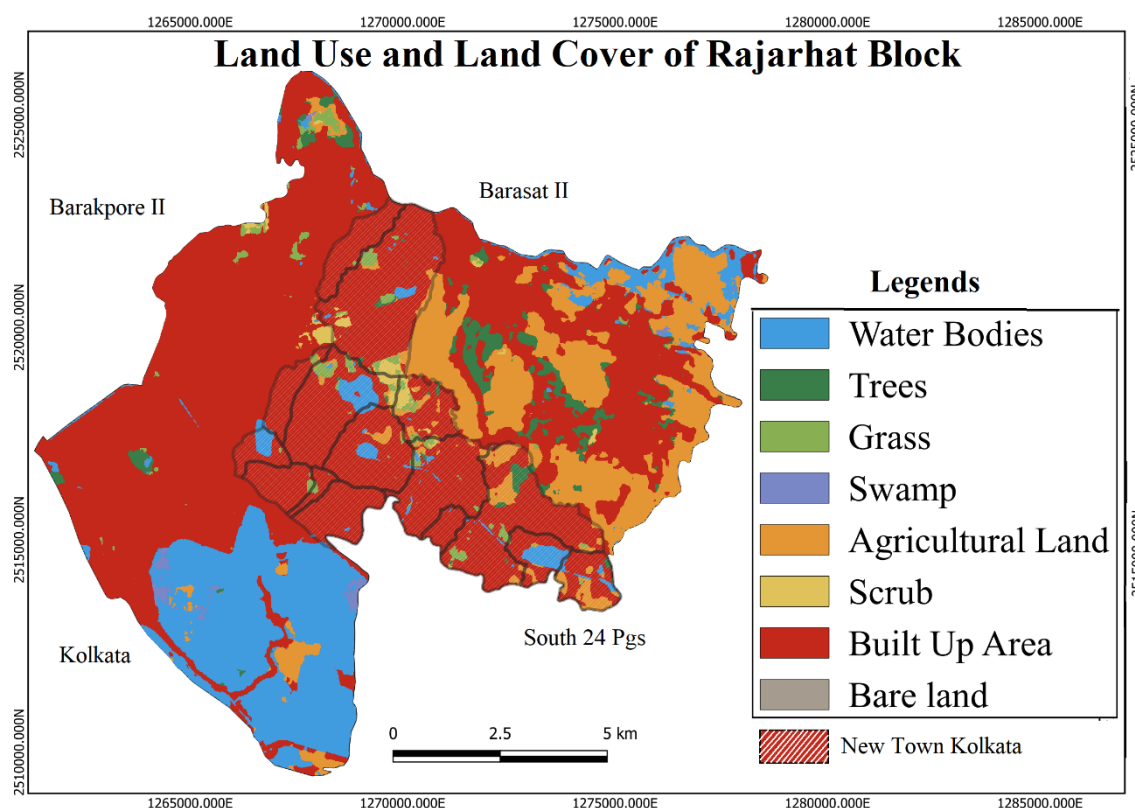


Figure 3: Source: Reproduced by the author from ESRI land use map 2020

It is to be noted that most of the converted agricultural land within and outside the juridical boundary of New Town Kolkata are now transformed into several housing estates like Sanjeeva Orchard, Sukhobrishti Township, Unitech Uniworld, etc.

For example, in Thakdari *mouza*, apart from the East Kolkata Wetland³ (EKW) area (35.60 acres approximately) within the village, *mouza* had a 1.62-acre wetland area and two big *Beels*, whose size is 0.69 acre and 0.11 acre. Out of 1.62 acres of wetland in the village, 0.7 acres of land have been directly purchased by WBHIDCO

³ East Kolkata Wetland is a Ramsar site so its legally protected from any type of conversion

for the New Township Project (Government of West Bengal, 2013). In total ten ponds and two small water bodies compared to a pond i.e., *Doba* has been filled up for purposes (Karmakar, 2015). However, for the permission of any project, the state government created a legal body called State Level Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC) and they look at the various aspects of the project including the environmental aspects.

The Committee proposes some stipulated conditions for environmental clearance as per the provision of Environmental Impact Assessment Notification 2006 and the subsequent amendments like water bodies if any, should not be lined and their embankments should not be cemented. The water bodies are to be kept in natural conditions without disturbing the ecological habitat. No existing water body, if any, should be encroached/relocated/reshaped without prior permission of competent authorities, and the unit should strictly abide by The West Bengal Trees (Protection and Conservation in Non-Forest Areas) Rules, 2007.

The proponent should undertake the plantation of trees over at least 20% of the total area. No trees can be felled without prior permission from the Tree Cutting Authority constituted as per the West Bengal Trees (Protection and Conservation in Non-Forest Areas) Act, 2006, and subsequent rules (GoWB, 2012). It is worthwhile to mention that these laws are applicable within the boundary of New Township, but outside the boundary, especially in peripheral villages, various housing enclaves are formed ignoring such environmental concerns.

1.4 Non-adherence to the national SCM and the floating of the Green City plan

As noted earlier, New Town Kolkata is a recently developed major planned satellite township located in the peri-urban areas of Kolkata which participated in the SCM competition in 2014. Out of three stages of the competition, New Town Kolkata participated in two stages of the competition. In fact, they also organized a program for stakeholder engagement. But in the month of August 2016, the state government rejected the smart city project and decided to develop selected cities along the line of its own 'Green City Project' (Ghosal, 2016).

According to government officials, there are two reasons for this move. The primary reason is the "skewed nature of investment from the state and the Centre" and the second reason is the mandatory collection of water taxes in smart cities (*Financial Express*, 2016). In the first public appearance after the 2016 election victory, the Chief Minister said the smart city's "ideas" and "theories" were "wrong." She argued that spending Rupees 500 million on smart city projects is not recommended and added that the money should be spent according to the state government's own understanding (Ghosal, 2016). It is a 7-year running program in which, except for West Bengal, all the states and Union Territories of India are participating and have nominated at least one city for the Smart Cities challenge.

1.4.1 Components of the Green City plan in comparison to SCM

After denouncing SCM, the government of West Bengal introduced Green City Mission (GCM) in the state. The two objectives of the GCM are to build an ‘environmentally friendly, sustainable, livable, an energy positive, safe city’ as well as to focus on the ‘creation of jobs and affordable housing for the poor’. The component of the program includes greening, blueing, and cleaning the city, building an energy-positive, safe, secure, technology-efficient city (GoWB, 2017).

Moreover, they also focused on livelihood generation programs as well as innovation efforts. Under the greening plan of the city, they stressed on projects like urban afforestation, park creation, and plantation along the medians of the road. In the case of the blueing plan, they focused on the conservation of water bodies, waterfront development, and water-based recreation. The concept of an energy-positive city is visualized through the installation of LED lights and incentives for green buildings. They emphasized battery-operated vehicles and eco-friendly parking spaces as well as CCTV installation at important locations under the program.

Initially, the state government invested Rupees 650 crore in GCM (Laha Roy, 2017). It was decided that Rupees 50 lakh each for all the 125 Urban Local Bodies (ULB) will be allotted (Ghosal, 2016). On July 25th 2018, the government of West Bengal informed the assembly that they spent Rupees 1372 crore (*Business Standard*, 2018). Since the start of the Green City mission, up to 3109 projects have been approved at an estimated cost of Rupees 1605.89 crore. Of these, Rupees 806.45 crore were released to ULB authorities primarily in the areas of LED street lights, high mast lighting, water body restoration, green space development, and various projects such as seating arrangements, bus stops, communal toilets, and water ATM, etc.

There are some basic differences between GCM and SCM. SCM proposed and tried to set up a new ad hoc structure within the ULB to implement the program, which is termed as an ‘extralegal’ body by the various stakeholders. On the contrary, GCM relies on the existing ULB’s elected representatives for the implementation of the program. Moreover, smart cities focused on area-based development programs, while, green city missions stressed city-wide project development and implementation.

Conclusion

This paper made an attempt to understand the challenges and concerns faced by the SCM in India. The SCM is still running, but policy-makers and scholars have raised some crucial questions regarding the fulfillment of the purpose of the projects. Critics argue that the implementation has usually been dubious, fragmented, and at best chequered. Smart cities have been separated from the reality and needs of people's lives and have finally been packed with "development" rhetoric. The peri-urban interface of New Town Kolkata shows that the area has been ecologically and economically transformed but it produces unequal access to resources and spaces in the townships. Moreover, the lack of education among the peri-urban population

created limited access to the job market. After the rejection of the SCM, New Town Kolkata adopted the green city mission, but since the mission is not directly linked with any livelihood mission as a result, it did not produce any job opportunities for people in the peri-urban interface, who lost their livelihood due to the transformation of space. Therefore, there is a difference between the existing reality and the visualization of the program.

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Feminist Re-imagination of Social Theories

Leena Pujari¹ and Nandini Sengupta²

Abstract

Disciplinary canons are gendered and there have been significant erasures and exclusions. Over the past several decades an impressive and original body of feminist criticism of social and political theory has emerged, that has forcefully challenged the masculinist assumptions of classical canons. A critique of the partial, androcentric nature of disciplines is the starting point for all feminist interventions. We begin by interrogating this canon, from political philosophy and economics to sociology, we argue how a series of dualisms and binaries have characterized the development of knowledge. Women and those from marginal locations lie on the periphery of this 'knowledge-making process'. We then ask what a feminist re-imagination of disciplines would entail. Is it all about adding the women's perspective to the existing masculinist discourses or is it about disrupting and dismantling those hegemonic discourses and a reconceptualization of the same from a feminist perspective with the necessary shifts in epistemologies and ontologies? We argue for a fundamental re-ordering of canonical precepts and discourses through a feminist lens.

Keywords: Feminism; Innovation; Pedagogy; Pandemic; Policy

Interrogating Disciplinary Canons

Feminist scholars have time and again drawn attention to the misogyny and exclusions inherent within disciplinary canons. (Okin, 1979; Pateman, 1986; Millet, Witz and Marshall, 2004 et al.). Constructed by men largely white, privileged, able-bodied, and cisgender from a certain location, especially in Europe and America, social theory has been a patrilineal discourse. Knowledge production has privileged both the male subject and the male knower. Susan Moller Okin (1979, p. 5) says 'great tradition of western political philosophy, consists of writings by men, for men, and about men'. Perhaps, it is an understatement to suggest that there have been

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silences, absences, and omissions. The erasures are systematic and by design. Janet Woolf (as cited in Witz and Marshall, 2004) talks about how masculinity has operated as a core/ foundational principle of the social. For instance, to the epistemological question 'Who can be legitimate knowers?' the answer has historically been, 'not women'.

We have to dig deeper and see the epistemological foundations, methodological assumptions, and ontological positions that underpin the masculinist discourses and mount a critique of the same. A critique of the partial, androcentric nature of disciplines is the starting point for all feminist interventions. We begin by interrogating this canon. Most of us have been schooled in this canon and we have experienced varying degrees of discomfort. However, the classics can no longer be read as we read them.

Hence, a critical unpacking of the gendered inclusions and erasures must precede a feminist re-imagination, something that **Carole Pateman** (1986) refers to as the feminist subversion of social and political theories. A rich body of feminist work has challenged the most fundamental presuppositions and categories of what has been variously termed as 'male-stream theory' (Mary O'Brien, 1981 as cited in Pateman, 1986) or 'androcentric domain assumptions' (March 1982 as cited in Witz and Marshall, 2004). When we start looking at the theories from the classical to modern and even beyond one is struck by a series of cartesian dualisms and binaries that have characterized the development of social and political theory.

Modern/traditional, public/private, mind/body - female reproductive body vs the male masculine rational mind, universal/particular, individual/social, masculine/feminine, nature/culture, subject/object, detached/embodied permeate our theories and knowledge.

Let us begin with the classics, philosophy first because social also encompasses the political, philosophical, and economic. Susan Moller Okin (1979, p. 22) tells us how Rousseau, for example, tells his reader at the beginning of the 'Discourse on the Origins and Foundation of Inequality among Men' that "*It is of man that I am to speak.*" For him, women's presence in the private sphere is necessary because they have to raise children. Rousseau's participatory democracy requires the existence of citizens who can devote considerable time to meetings and civic matters. 'If all the adults of both sexes were to be as much preoccupied with civic activity as citizenship in a direct democracy requires, who would maintain the private sphere of life which Rousseau perceives as crucially important?' (p. 286).

Plato argues that the pursuit of philosophy was a rational goal that required withdrawal from everyday mundane activities. He said that for women to play an equal role with men in the public space would require the demolition of the private sphere, that is, the sphere of the family. This was the same philosopher who also argued that the female sex was created from the souls of the most wicked and irrational men. How can the claim that women are 'by nature' twice as bad as men are reconciled with the revolutionary idea that they should be included among the exalted philosophic rulers of the ideal state?

Aristotle, for example, discusses at length what is the highest good for a human being. He then proceeds to characterize all women as not only conventionally deprived of but constitutionally unfit for this highest good. He held that women have

a natural function: their purpose is reproduction and childrearing so that men can be left free to pursue politics. While Mill wrote a major work of feminist theory, 'The Subjection of Women (1869), nonetheless he could not imagine that married women would not assume their traditional responsibility for the unpaid labor of the family (Okin, 1979).

In each of these cases, the assumption that the family is a natural sphere where women perform most of the work is paramount. In building their theories philosophers often ask 'What are men like?' 'What is man's potential?' whereas for women the question invariably is 'What are women for?' There is, then, an undeniable connection between assigned 'female nature' and social structure (Okin, p 24).

'Human nature', we realize, as described and discovered by philosophers such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, and many others, is intended to refer only to male human nature. Consequently, all the rights and needs that they have considered for humanness to entail have not been perceived as applicable to the female half of the human race.

Even the enlightenment thinkers provided elaborate frameworks that furthered the exclusion of women from the intellectual and public domain. The dualisms of mind over body, masculine over the feminine, and science over nature received a further fillip with the work of Enlightenment thinkers and reinforced the 'private' as the domain of women. Kant identified women with inclination and men with reason. Science played an important part in giving a male content to the question of 'what it is to be a good knower. The methods and ideology of modern science on which social sciences have modeled themselves have reinforced the idea of masculine and scientific hegemony over nature and women.

The sociological canon is full of misogyny. Auguste Comte, one of the early founders and a positivist believed that a woman is inferior and should be naturally subservient to men as this was good for social stability. Interestingly he also opined that since a woman is the epitome of humanity, her mission was to humanize modern men. Women, as wives and mothers, provide the essential basis for the rejuvenation of a society plagued with alienated, morally and sexually unstable men. He makes a comparison to the animal kingdom and says just as among animals, among humans too, men are superior to women intellectually, physically, and practically.

According to Emile Durkheim, the evolutionary scale is characterized by increasing differentiation between men and women. While men move closer to civilization, women lag behind. Men and women are both body and soul, corporeal and embodied, and have the social (read society) embedded in them. While men are able to overcome this tussle between senses and morals which is essentially social, women are unable to overcome or resist the pull of the senses. Hence women lag behind in the civilizational discourse. Durkheim assumes and builds his theory on, the veracity of accounts of absolute sexual difference drawn from such 'sciences' as craniometry, as well as biological accounts of 'drives' and 'instincts' (Witz and Marshall, 2004).

Karl Marx has been an inspirational and profound thinker and feminists draw substantially from his work though he did not develop a theory of gender. However, his writings have drawn attention to how capitalism appropriates the labor of

women. For instance, In *The German Ideology*, he speaks about how the father appropriates the labor of women and children. In the *Communist Manifesto*, he talks about how the bourgeois family treats women like private property. Despite these references to women's exploited labor, at no point in *Capital* does Marx recognize that the reproduction of labor-power entails women's unpaid domestic work or how surplus labor is extracted from the unwaged as well. While he analyses the capitalist exploitation of women's labor, his focus is purely on women as factory workers (Federici, 2018).

Considered the founder of Economics, Adam Smith concentrates heavily on political economy and the market of self-interest in his book 'The Wealth of Nations' published in 1776. Although women in Scotland and Europe during Smith's time did work for pay, the chapters on the division of labor do not mention the sexual division of labor. The chapters on wages and inequalities of wages and profits in different occupations have no reference to women's wages. According to Smith tangible goods are produced by 'productive labor' and intangible goods or services are produced by 'unproductive labor'. Going by this general approach he classified defense, government bureaucracy, justice, and domestic service as unproductive employments as they do not create a product for sale however useful they may be.

However, later in his "Lectures on Jurisprudence" (published after his death) he brings out the differences between men and women across four stages of economic development: the age of hunters, pasture, agriculture, and commerce. The central underlying idea explaining the history of the status of women, their property rights, and the distribution of rights within the family across the stage of economic development is that the biological differences between men and women have remained constant but the social significance of these differences has been a variable. The mode of subsistence has been an important determinant of the status of women. He suggested that with the development of commerce and industry the importance of physical differences will lessen, and women's social and economic position will improve (Clark 1993).

These ideas were barely noticed in the writings of subsequent classical economists and in fact, were challenged by later scholars. John Millar (1960) for instance, declared that if women get economic freedom due to economic development, then they will demand sexual freedom which will destroy the family and undermine paternity. Thus, throughout the classical era, women's economic roles were neglected whether inside or outside the household. If at all discussed (as done by Smith) it was often half concealed (Dimand et al. 2004).

Neoclassical economists like Ricardo advocated that everyone will be better off through comparative advantage and efficiency gains from specializations. These claims were challenged by feminist economists like Irene van Staveren, Diane Elson, Caren Grown, and Nilüfer Çagatay (1988) who argued that Ricardian theory cannot be generalized across genders. Gender inequality may both assist and hinder the development of international competitiveness and the distribution of gains from trade, within and across countries. At the same time, trade policies and flows have contradictory impacts on gender equality. Gender inequality can be reduced by an appropriate mix of and sequence of trade and economic policies.

Address of gender issues even in post-Keynesian economics is rather limited. Post-Keynesians argued that wage earners have a higher propensity to consume than capitalists. Hence a redistribution from capital to labor can increase aggregate demand (Dutt, 1991). However feminist economists argue that at the level of labor households, men have been found to be less inclined towards consumption of necessary household goods and more favorable in consuming luxury goods in comparison to women (Dwyer and Bruce, 1988). Therefore, extending the post-Keynesian concept of propensity to consume with gender distributional effects (transfer of more income in women's hands) would increase aggregate demand through increased consumer expenditures. Thus, traditional economic theories and canons have largely excluded the gender lens in their analysis of economic issues. In all of the above, one can discern, rigidly drawn boundaries between the public and private, with most of the theorizing happening around capitalism, industrialization, secularization, urbanization, reason, rights, contract, individualism, freedom, equality, and citizenship - the usual hallmarks of modernity. Women's very subjectivity was construed as being of a fundamentally different order than men's and it certainly wasn't that of the 'modern' subject.

Thus, classical social theory constructed a disembodied, abstract, rational subject as the ideal subject of modernity. This is the familiar dualism of universal/particular - with the public world of universalized 'humanity' (read men) counterposed to the private world of particularity (read women).

For much of our history, the body has been conceptualized as simply one biological object among others which our rational faculties set us apart from, as well as an instrument to be directed, and a possible source of disruption to be controlled.

The opposition between mind and body has also been correlated with an opposition between male and female, with the female regarded as enmeshed in her bodily existence in a way that makes the attainment of rationality questionable. Women are somehow more biological, more corporeal, and more natural and therefore pushed to the private sphere that remains outside the domain of rights and justice.

The public-private divide was forcefully challenged by second-wave feminists who by focusing political attention on the private sphere have questioned the effects of keeping the body and things sexual hidden from view. Does liberty, feminists ask, require that we sacrifice emotions to reason or domestic matters to public affairs? (Landes, 1998)

In a structuralist world, we were overwhelmed by positivist, functionalist knowledge. A post-structuralist world has forcefully challenged claims of universality and homogeneity but the epistemological and theoretical frameworks haven't changed. These erasures and exclusions continue in contemporary social theory in a rather novel manner. Lisa Adkins' (2016) argues that post-structural society reconceptualizes the notion of agency - a freeing of agents from structure, releasing them to become mobile and reflexive subjects - and that these are conditions to which women are granted far less access. While in classical social theory, women were excluded from sociality, here woman is overdetermined by the social, indeed cannot escape the social.

So, the ontology of the social and political is masculine and there is no acknowledgment of how the public sphere gains its meaning and significance primarily in opposition to, the private world of particularity, natural subjection, inequality, emotion, love, partiality, and women and femininity. If they did so, they would have to question their conception of theoretical inquiry. Mary O'Brien (1981) has explored some of the reasons why our theoretical heritage lacks 'a philosophy of birth', and has drawn attention to the manner in which the conventional understanding of the 'political' is built upon the rejection of physical birth in favor of the masculine creation of (giving birth to) social and political order.

The ramifications of such androcentric knowledge production have been humongous. This masculinist discourse continues to be reproduced not just in our classrooms but also in our courtrooms, workplaces, state policies so on and so forth. For instance, discourses and debates around marital rape, Section 377, Sabrimala, and many more speak of a hegemonic, masculinist discourse that is being centered and mainstreamed to the exclusion of other discourses. Our understanding of democracy is quite flawed. Ideas of justice, liberty, and solidarity are understood only with respect to public places.

The ideas of liberty and non-discrimination seem alien to the home, which is the site of horrendous domestic abuse, and justice for survivors is a long haul. These binaries also reverberate in academia. Subjects that center the 'private' as a mode of inquiry and engagement are described as 'soft subjects' not worthy of a scientific study. For instance, when we center the private and personal domain as we have done in sociology there is always the danger of being sidestepped or considered 'soft'. We continue to rely on the methods and frameworks of traditional patriarchal theories. Feminist research methods are often seen as 'not scientific and objective enough' or rather lacking the 'rigor' that is so typical of quantitative research methods.

Within the professional life and career structures of social science, those who choose to work on the domestic aspects of social existence are marginalized in relation to those who work on the public aspects. Since there is a marked tendency for the former to be women and for the latter to be men, the masculinist bias of social science finds expression in forms of gender segmentation of the social scientific professional labor markets. This, in turn, has implications for who is found to be most relevant to current theoretical definitions of the agenda for social science and perpetuates the dualistic and gender-coded ordering of that gender. When the public aspect of social existence has a privileged status, its relationship of mutual dependence to the domestic aspect is obscured. This has the effect of making the public domain falsely appear as self-sustaining, and of encouraging thereby an equation of social life with public life. In this context, it is not just that the 'economy' looms larger in theoretical terms than 'love' but that 'love' disappears altogether from the theoretical view. Accordingly, 'the economy' is placed in the center of the theoretical space that social science constructs, while 'love' is consigned to the margins.

Engendering the social vs a Feminist Re-imagination

Engendering social theories connotes the idea of inclusion within the framework of masculinist discourses but does not enable a shift or an interrogation of epistemologies, methodologies, or the nature of knowledge production. Thus, a feminist re-imagination cannot be about a politics of equality or about incorporating women or 'adding them' to the existing corpus of knowledge because then, they would be pale reflections of men, something like surrogate men or duplicate men that Smith (1987) talks about because the very foundation of these disciplines and their theoretical frameworks have been imagined in opposition to women. Their position as the subjects or producers of knowledge was never raised. Hence the political, ontological, and epistemological commitments underlying patriarchal discourses, as well as their theoretical contents required re-evaluation from feminist perspectives.

A feminist re-imagination on the other hand enables that epistemic shift and a reconceptualization of the discipline from the standpoint of those on the margins. Feminists, like Carole Pateman (1986) and Kate Millet (1970) for instance advocate a **politics of autonomy** rather than equality. What we need is a fundamental restructuring, re-fashioning, and reconceptualization of the public and private, modes of knowing and inquiry. It is about bridging the distance between personal and political, between self and discipline. The whole social, political, scientific, and metaphysical underpinning of patriarchal theoretical systems needs to be shaken up. A feminist re-imagination can be diverse and multiple just as there are many feminisms and not one.

Situated and embodied knowledge

What would a feminist re-imagination look like? Here we bring in **Dorothy Smith's** (1987) work on standpoint feminist epistemology. Smith, a feminist sociologist argues that the roots of women's oppression lie not so much in her cultural and political exclusion as in the structures of knowledge that map the world. This intellectual and social world that we inhabit, where we do research, teach and build theories, is centered around the experiences of men, 'the inner circle' as she says, where men produce knowledge about men and for men, from which women have been consciously excluded. This inner circle is part of the 'relations of the ruling' (p.3) an idea she takes from Marxist theory to describe a set of practices invested with power to determine the contours of knowledge and define the academic agenda and these invariably happen to be defined by men³.

There is a certain dissonance here. It appears as though we stand outside this entire corpus of knowledge. It seems very distant and alien and does not speak to or have a conversation with our concrete, material lives. This knowledge is supposed to be objective, rational, universal, impersonal anchored in the structures of /occupies

³ As she says 'when I write of "ruling" in this context I am identifying a complex of organized practices, including government, law, business and financial management, professional organization, and educational institutions as well as the discourses in texts that interpenetrate the multiple sites of power

the world of administration, business, bureaucracy, and industry but delinked from particularized entities of family, home, relationships, etc.

This process of knowing or constructing knowledge does not recognize our embodied and embedded selves removing the local, personal, and everyday from the process of theory building and erasing what we are embedded in, the ties of kinship, family, and household. It seems to take on the view of 'ruling' an idea Smith takes from Marxist theory, to describe a set of practices invested with power to determine the contours of knowledge and define the academic agenda and these are invariably inhabited by men.

She became acutely conscious of this bifurcated consciousness, between the world of work and home. There is a constant shuttling between a consciousness organized within the relations of ruling, which tells us that we have to maintain a rigid demarcation between public and private and a consciousness implicated in the local particularities of home and family. The intellectual world spread out before us appears as genderless, far removed from our particular locations and identities. A collaborative research endeavor between Population First and Gender Issues Cell, K C College on gender sensitivity and inclusivity within media brought out these antinomies very clearly.

Some of our respondents spoke about the complete segregation between the world of work and home. Masculine values of rationality, objectivity, and neutrality defined the sphere of work with absolutely no sense of empathy or compassion for and in relation to the private/domestic domain and the telling impact of this bifurcation on their careers and professional growth (Pujari and Sinha, 2019).

Dorothy asks whether we can have different modes of thinking/knowing, and theorizing. A feminist mode of inquiry perhaps, that can then begin with women's experiences from women's standpoint. She asks whether the real everyday world, with its messiness, disorganization, and so-called personalized ways of knowing can be the subject of inquiry instead of the abstract, context-independent, value-neutral, and objective, a universal world that exists outside us. Can we locate the knower in the everyday world of experience? If we do, then women become both the subjects as well as the objects of knowledge. Such a re-fashioning and re-imagination is necessary if the feminist theory is to avoid the intellectual perils of abstraction, idealization, or irrelevance.

In taking women's experiences and lives as a starting point for the development of theory, feminism attempts to develop alternatives to the rigid, hierarchical, and exclusive concept of reason. Feminist theory brought to the fore new forms of writing, and methods of analysis. No one method, the form of writing, speaking position, or mode of argument can act as a representative, model, or ideal for feminist theory. Concepts like experience, the body, history, etc are acknowledged as necessary for reason to function.

Dorothy Smith's work has been critiqued by scholars like Collins (1992) who argues that Smith privileges texts over local oral traditions or writings that are not amenable to a logical, formal discourse but appear as stories and narratives. She further asks whether it's prudent to first join the inner circle, as Smith suggests, and then mount a critique within the dominant framework.

She was further accused of privileging a particular kind of experience, the experiences of women to the exclusion of other marginal experiences. In a rejoinder to Collins (1992), Smith clarified that she was actually privileging the experiences of those on the margins and they could be anyone, from an Afro-American and gay to a lesbian.

A feminist re-imagination enables shifts in paradigms and epistemologies. It is in many ways emancipatory and reflective, open to scrutiny, and has addressed the initial slippages and exclusions along caste, class, race, ableism, and ethnicity. Feminist re-imagination seeks a new discursive space, a space that will encourage a proliferation of voices, a plurality of perspectives and interests, new methods of knowing, and uses an intersectional lens.

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Inclusive Politics and Surfacing Women Leadership in Urban Local Governance

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Abstract

To ensure the democratic decentralization of power, participation, and representation of all the sections of society in political structures, one of the most important affirmative actions that have been taken in India is the enactment of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act for urban local governing bodies. Inclusion through reservation has ensured equality of political opportunities, especially for women who are always seen as passive and mute spectators in every sphere. In Jammu and Kashmir (formerly a state), 2005 year acclaimed as a significant moment for women's political inclusion for the first time, wherein electoral outcomes were largely facilitated by quotas of reserved seats that mandate 33% female representation at the ward membership level. This paper explores the efficacy of inclusive politics at the local level and emerging women leaders as corporators in urban local governing bodies. Does this provision of reservation of seats for women actually lead to favorable outcomes? How these women leaders are grappling with their newly defined roles, responsibilities, and obstacles coming their way?

Keywords: Urban; Local Governance; Inclusion; Reservation; Women; Leadership

Introduction

Social inclusion, participation, equality, and the role of gender in governance are the important parameters that strengthen each other in empowering the disadvantaged sections of society. Municipal bodies provide the institutional framework for the concept of democratic decentralization in urban India. The report on 'Towards Equality' recommends the reservation of 33% of seats in all elected assemblies, from the village to the Union level for women and political parties to promote women's electoral representation by giving at least 33% of their tickets to women candidates. In 1989, the Rajiv Gandhi government introduced a

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decentralization bill which ultimately becomes the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, providing 33% reservations for women in local elected bodies, but women's quotas did exist at the local level even before 1993. Ghosh and Rewal in their book *Democratization in Progress: Women and Local politics in Urban India* highlighted the fact that since the late 1980s, the Indian Government had consistently tried to uplift local bodies from their inconsequential and insignificant status to economically and politically viable units of self-government. With the passage of this amendment, constitutional status was conferred on urban local bodies in India for the first time. In the new dispensation, municipalities are the institutions of self-government, with regularly elected bodies, devolution of additional powers and functions, planning responsibilities, and a new system of fiscal transfers.

One of the important provisions of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act is to make city government more inclusive by ensuring the representation of women in local bodies through the introduction of a quota system. Not less than one-third of the seats in any municipality are now reserved for women, and such seats are to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies of the municipality. Seats are also reserved for SCs and STs in every Municipality in accordance with their share of the total population of the town and city. There is also a provision of one-third reservation for women of posts of chairpersons of these local bodies.

Jammu and Kashmir are the last one to incorporate reservations for women under the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution. After the conversion of Jammu and Kashmir into Union Territory, the Government has also implemented 33% reservation for women in the Block Development Councils (BDCs), a second tier of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Therefore, it makes this paper interesting as it has looked into the changes women are witnessing both at a political and personal level in this region. The inclusion of women in the political structures in urban local governing structures is utterly significant. The paper presents the findings of an empirical study that has been carried out in the Municipal Corporation of Jammu city.

Historical background: municipal bodies in Jammu and Kashmir

In order to strengthen the basis of the Raj and paved the way for the political consciousness of the masses, an institutional framework was created by the British and feudal lords ((Maharajas) for the growth and development of local self-government in Jammu and Kashmir. The Municipal government in the state of Jammu and Kashmir came into existence in 1886 A.D. when the first Municipal Act was passed and two municipalities, viz., Jammu and Srinagar were constituted. Jammu municipality was formed in March 1886 and Srinagar municipality in April of the same year.

Nisar in her book *Development of Local Self Government in J&K State (1846-1947)* explained that these municipalities were constituted to improve the general

conditions of cities and their inhabitants. The Act of 1886 was further amended by Act XVI of 1889. In the year 1893, the Department of Municipal Administration was set up to ensure focused attention on municipal administration. It was only in 1913, the Municipal Act of 1889 was replaced and a new Act was passed, the Jammu and Kashmir Municipal Regulation Act of 1913, introducing the provision of an elective element in these local bodies. Under the provisions of this Act, both the municipalities in the state as far as finances are concerned, the municipalities depended entirely on the state government and were not allowed to levy any tax. The octroi duty levied by them was collected by the revenue department of the government. But after this new enactment, they were also empowered to impose a tax on buildings and land, profession and trade, vehicles, animals and boats, water supply, lightning tax, and any other tax that the government may approve and sanction.

The Committee consisted of 16 nominated members and 8 elected members. Of the elected members in Srinagar, one was elected by traders, three by Sunni Muslims, one by Shia Muslims, and three by Hindus. In Jammu, there were 12 nominated and 6 elected members. Of the elected members, one was elected by traders, two by Muslims, one by Thakurs, and two by Hindus. The proportion of elected members to the total members was 1:3 and the elections were held on the basis of separate electorates.

The next important development which enhanced the financial position of the municipalities in the state was the enactment of the Jammu and Kashmir Municipal Act of 1941, which repealed the Municipal Act of 1913. In addition to the taxes allowed under the 1913 Act, the municipalities were allowed to levy new taxes on advertisements and on dogs kept within the municipal area. This highlighted the fact that the municipalities of Jammu and Srinagar were initially under the control of the government due to the overwhelming majority of the nominated members.

After 1947, Jammu and Kashmir's government had taken numerous significant steps for the development of the towns and cities through the enactment of the Jammu and Kashmir Municipal Act, 1951, and the municipalities were empowered to levy taxes and raise funds through license fees. With the enactment of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, of 1992, the state legislature enacted two legislations in November 2000, namely, the Jammu and Kashmir Municipal Act, 2000, to replace the existing Municipal Act of 1951 and the Jammu and Kashmir Municipal Corporation Act, 2000. Democratization of civic bodies was a historic event, that has given a fillip to the decision-making process for the first time in the history of municipal government in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The organizational structure of Municipal bodies is divided into three levels:

- The Corporation comprises members called corporate/councilors, elected on an adult franchise for a term of five years.
- The Mayor: elected councilors select one of the councilors as Mayor and act as head of the city government but as deprived of executive powers, the position of Mayor is weak in the administrative structure of the municipal bodies of

Jammu and Kashmir.

- The Standing Committee: Each Municipal body has four standing committees namely, General Functions Committee, Finance, and Planning Committee, Public Health and Sanitation Committee, and Social Justice Committee.

To widen the scope of women for participation in the development process, Jammu and Kashmir Municipal Corporation and Municipal Act 2000 contained a provision for reservation (quota) of one-third of the seats for women in urban local government. At that time when the research was conducted, the provisions of the 74th Amendment were not extended to the Jammu and Kashmir state owing to the special status under article 370. Statutory provisions such as holding regular elections, the Constitution of State Election and Finance Commission, District Planning and Metropolitan Committees, and so forth, have not been implemented by the Jammu and Kashmir State. However, some of its provisions were incorporated through amendments in the State Act. Presently, there are five sections/departments to look after the various functions in Jammu Municipal Corporation- Health and Sanitation Wing, Khilafwarzi Wing, Legal Section, Veterinary Wing, and Building Section.

Even, decentralization of functions has not been achieved yet and is being performed by the municipalities in consultation with respective state government departments. For example, water supply facilities are maintained by the Public Health and Engineering Department (PHE), roads are maintained by the Public Works Department (PWD), collection of electricity dues is by the Power Development Department (PDD), etc. As of now after the abrogation of Article 370, many Amendments have been made in most of the State Acts, viz., State Election Commission and Finance Commission is constituted for the next forthcoming local level elections.

How these women shaped urban local politics and created spaces for themselves, through the provision of the reservation is an important issue that is examined in the present paper. It was only in the year 2005, after a gap of 26 years, and in the year 2018 after a gap of eight years that elections in urban local bodies have been conducted, wherein quotas of reserved seats are seen as compensatory mechanisms to reach equality of result in a representation of women in these bodies.

Methodology

Primary data has been collected through fieldwork and various secondary sources like books, articles, journals, government reports, and other reports have also been consulted. A structured interview schedule has been used in the present study in which a set of questions was framed before a visit to the field to seek the answers relevant to the issue under consideration. During the fieldwork, a lot of additional information has been recorded through observation, thus helping in validating the responses given by the respondents. To illustrate, there have been various places where water coolers, transformers, parks, and lanes have been inaugurated by the women members which were verified by observing the inaugural plates and

signboards. All the ex-elected women corporators (2005) and present elected women corporators (2018) of Jammu Municipal Corporation were interviewed.

In this paper, the theoretical framework used by Dahlerup to study the role reservation (quotas) plays in increasing the political participation and active visibility of women at the local level in the governing bodies has been followed. Dahlerup (1998) argues that in order to increase the representation of women in publicly elected or appointed institutions such as governance, parliaments, and local councils, quotas (reserved seats) are considered inclusionary practices of the political institutions at large. The argument is based on the experience that equality as a goal cannot be reached by formal treatment as a means.

If barriers exist, it is argued, compensatory measures must be introduced as a means to reach equality of results. The creation of these quotas which has resulted in bringing women to Jammu Municipal Corporation is gradually changing the assumptions like women are not interested in politics; they are seen as less capable in politics, etc.

Surfacing Women Leadership: Evidence from the field

Participation of women in any political institution has a close association with their socio-economic and political background. Women as citizens play an important role at the local level and contribute towards the development of the local economy. In this context, the provision of reservation of seats in the State Act of Jammu Municipal Corporation was an attempt to encourage women's grassroots participation in local politics.

From being excluded to getting included in local politics, reservation has worked as a catalyst for these women but other socio-economic variables have worked in a positive direction in offering a platform to women in the political realm.

Mostly, women who are in the age group of 30-40 years and 20-30 years at the time of contesting elections have become Municipal corporators for the first time. A maximum number of women respondents in Municipal Corporation were literate and had education up to matriculation. It has also been observed in the field that those women respondents, who were illiterate, have learned to read and write over a period of time. Most of them said that they discontinued their studies due to marriage and domestic responsibilities.

The majority of the women respondents were married. Only two of them were widows and there was not even a single case of an unmarried woman. This shows that these women seem to be fulfilling their responsibilities of married life as well as their political career. Most of them stated that they are getting active support and cooperation from their husbands. Society accepts married women easily as compared to unmarried women because contesting in politics is not seen as safe for unmarried ones.

Family and the political party appeared as a major training resource for the ex-corporators as well as the newcomers. Most of these women have contested reserved

seats that have a positive impact on their overall consciousness. Reservation of seats for women of all caste categories in the municipal bodies has encouraged the emergence of leaders at the grass-root level. A maximum number of respondents were elected from the open category, followed by Scheduled Caste. In some cases, it was found that even though the seat is reserved for open category candidates, two Scheduled Caste women contested, defeated the candidates who belonged to Brahmin and Mahajan sub-caste, and won from that seat because of their husband's political linkage and dominance of Scheduled Caste community in that area. It can be inferred that in spite of growing urbanization, caste is playing a dominant role in Indian politics and it has some influence on local politics in urban areas too.

One of the most significant factors for contesting and winning elections is the support of a political party that has emerged as an important reservoir for dispersing information about the same. After getting tickets to contest elections, they were allowed to use party symbols in the campaign and on the ballots. None of them had contested elections before the implementation of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, yet their families were associated with political activities. The majority of the women respondents' affinal and natal family members did not have any previous experience.

For effective participation in the political institutions at the local level, knowledge about the State Acts is an important parameter. Most of the women respondents were aware of the provision of the State Municipal Act. These elected women members did not have any ward office, provided to them by the government. They stated that whenever they held meetings in their respective wards, they listened to the problems of their voters and represented them before the mayor in the house meetings.

Decision-making is an important variable indicating empowerment and the strength of participation of women at various levels of governance. The majority of the ex-women respondents expressed their opinions about the decisions that were taken in the house meetings. Although they only expressed their opinion instead of directly participating in the decisions, the voicing of their viewpoint still to some extent influenced the policy decisions being taken by their respective parties. This definitely provided the much-needed space for women to speak up and raise their voices.

But most of them are making various kinds of efforts to overcome these difficulties and are happy with the support they are getting from government officials. Most of them enjoyed cordial relationships with their male colleagues. Although these women carry the dual burden, they performed their duties efficiently and made their contribution visible in the public sphere which remains invisible within the private sphere.

Participation, Performance, and Hindrances Faced by Women Corporators:

- Most of them highlighted that they have installed transformers and electric

lights on poles, provided help in constructing lanes, drains and toilet complexes, and even parks, so as to make their wards beautiful, and distributed sewing machines to the needy women. They also made local people aware of different schemes related to health, and education and informed them about the polio vaccination, immunization of tuberculosis, etc. They have been performing various tasks and functions, for example, distribution of ration (wheat, rice, etc.), blankets, and stationery, for sustaining the livelihood of below-poverty line people, helping the widows to get pensions, and making birth certificates.

- The type of issues raised and discussed in the meetings by the women respondents is seen as an important indicator of their involvement in municipalities. Issues related to financial resources, civic development, basic facilities, and women-child welfare were the main issues in the meetings as reported by them. All of them mentioned that they visited their wards whenever they got the time and inspect whether the lanes, drains, electric poles; street lights, garbage, water supply, etc. are functioning properly or not. It is important to note here that even after the expiration of their term or tenure, people still visit them frequently for getting their work done or if they have any problem related to their ward, to share that problem.
- Most of the women attended municipal affairs over and above their household work. Only 11 (5 ex-corporators & 6 sitting ones) spent less than two hours per day in municipal work and said that their husbands also accompanied them.
- Scarcity of funds, lack of education and incentives, less political experience and interference from political opponents, absence of proper formal training opportunities and capacity-building programs for the elected women members, and the system of rotation of reserved constituencies are seen as major constraints for their effective participation in the municipal bodies.
- Most of them said that there is a scarcity of funds in order to solve the problems of basic amenities in their localities and to cover personal expenses incurred in the course of their work as local representatives. Women respondents also informed that they never get correct information about the total allocations and there is non-availability of funds on time. Despite these limitations and problems, these women participate and perform their duties and roles efficiently at the urban local level.

Their perception of what the system of reservation in elections has brought to them was quite encouraging and optimistic. Because of their political position, they have become more confident and assertive and gained more knowledge and interest in politics. Most of them found a change in their attitude, and lifestyle, and increased awareness of the wide range of issues, and feel confident enough to fulfill people's expectations.

- In most cases, these women found a new personality as they come to be identified and known by their own names instead of their husbands' or

parents'. They received a distinct identity by name-Mam, Madam Ji, Badi Didi Ji. They are invited to grace every occasion or function taking place in their ward. This shows that reservation has provided them an opportunity to start believing in themselves which will ultimately increase their real power and confidence.

- A significant number of women (19) re-contested the municipal elections (2018) irrespective of whether the ward is reserved or not, while the rest of them are not interested or not sure at this stage. It was found that only 4 ex-corporators again won from the ward that has not been reserved in the 2018 elections only because of the earlier work and progress made by them in their respective wards. Those who replied in the negative, argued that the system of the rotational reservation will serve against their interests.

All these women respondents are entering into a new era of local politics in this specific region by participating, performing their duties efficiently, specifically raising their voices for different unheard issues, and identifying the alternative ways through which healthy and efficacious participation can be checked and assured.

Conclusions

From being passive to becoming more agile, the women who entered in municipal bodies of Jammu, significant change and the beginning of an empowerment impact of their participation has been quite vibrant in the last few years. It is true that the battle for women's active participation in the local government has just started; they will have a long way to go. Inclusive politics with a provision of one-third reservation for women showed favorable results in one way or the other and has brought consequent emergence of leadership and social change in women's lives in general and urban areas in particular. There is a need for a constitutional compulsion to make the states more committed to devolving more powers, functions, and resources to municipal bodies so that they might fulfill their mandate as institutions of self-government. But a lot has to be done to enable the constitutional amendment in urban areas more applied through the experiences and direct observable realities portrayed by these women corporators in order to make local governance more inclusive and beneficial for all the masses.

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Eye Care and Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Vision is not only critical to an individual's growth and development but also has direct implications for national and global development. It holds the potential to boost the global economy in a fair and equitable manner. It enables everyone to live their lives to the fullest, releasing their potential to learn, work, and lead fulfilled and productive lives. This paper examines the direct and indirect implications of eye health care on the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, thereby making it contingent upon policymakers to invest in the 'vision for all'. The study proposes urgent policy interventions for creating integrated people-centered eye care, embedded in health systems and based on strong primary health care, and scaled and decentralized to the grassroots level in India. It emphasizes eye care in local governance -especially below the district level for effective implementation.

Keywords: Eye Care; Well-Being; Health Policy; Sustainable Development Goals; Vision for All

Introduction

Our eyes are the locus of primary access to the world around us. They allow us to interact with it and facilitate physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Vision loss and impairment affect more than how people see; it has implications for inequities in employment, healthcare access, and income. Thus, ensuring the eye health of the people of every nation is a key component of policymaking. Vision makes an important contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and has been aligned with the attainment of each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) listed by the United Nations (UN). The inherent rationale behind this is that without proper vision and eyesight, the people remain lacking in contributing their bit towards the 2030 Agenda.

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According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 80% of all causes of visual impairment are preventable or curable. Yet many populations do not have access to good-quality, affordable eye care. This is accurate for India as well. The provision of effective and accessible eye care services is the key to effectively controlling visual impairment, including blindness.

India, being a geographically and socio-economically diverse country, faces deprivation in terms of access to necessities, education, and health. Among these, the focus allotted to eye health care remains in abeyance. There exists neglect of accessibility, availability, and affordability.

The government's efforts need to be particularly targeted at the Indian population, and a study to precede an eye-care policy is needed. This would evidence the actual need, types of eye-health problems, and necessary steps for rectification of such problems. Such a study of the actual prevailing status of eye care would be a pioneering one, and go a long way in establishing the need for investment in eye care across the world towards the attainment of SDGs of the UN.

Hence, the overriding understanding is that the attainment of the SDGs is contingent upon the good eye health of the populace, and all problems relating to vision and eyesight need urgent corrective actions. This further translates into the need for every government to invest, among other areas, more proactively towards strengthening eye care services, such that these are affordable, accessible, and available for all. In other words, the *eye health security* of the entire population is ensured. Therefore, it is pertinent to establish the enormity of the significance of eye health for every human being and critical that countries adopt a comprehensive approach to vision and include eye health in their implementation of the SDGs at the national level.

Prioritizing Eye Health: Rationale and Motivation

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) recognized sight as a 'right' and launched the *VISION 2020: The Right to Sight* initiative in 1999. It aimed to eliminate avoidable blindness in the world by 2020 and targeted the world's leading causes of avoidable visual impairment, i.e., cataracts, trachoma, onchocerciasis, childhood blindness (including Vitamin-A deficiency), refractive error and low vision (Pararajasegaram, 1999). Committed to reducing the burden of preventable blindness by 2020, the NGO "Right to Sight" India, was founded in May 2004 as a confederation parallel to the international body (Deshpande, 2008). It aimed to provide support to those with avoidable vision loss and ensure that efficient and cost-effective interventions are accessible. VISION 2020: The Right to Sight - INDIA is a registered not-for-profit forum and is a key driver of the global initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) for reducing avoidable visual impairment by the year 2020. It is a collaborative effort of INGOs, NGOs, eye care organizations in India, and the Government to coordinate and advocate for improved eye care programs; to gain and share knowledge and together develop solutions to achieve quality, comprehensive and equitable eye care.

As per the World Report on Vision 2019, approximately 2.2 billion people across the world suffer from vision impairment or blindness. Of these, at least a billion people have a vision impairment that could have been prevented or are yet to be addressed (World Health Organization, 2019). According to their evaluations, 90% of vision loss is concentrated in low- and middle-income countries, with the poor and vulnerable segments being disproportionately impacted in availability, access, affordability, and quality (ibid).

Further, a 2021 Seva Foundation report, 'The Economic and Social Cost of Visual Impairment and Blindness in India', estimates the economic and social costs of moderate and severe visual impairment (MSVI) and blindness in India, at INR 1,158 billion or \$ 54.4 billion. A more conservative estimate focusing only on employment loss and elevated mortality risk yields a cost of INR 504 billion or \$ 23.7 billion. Overall, the results show that poor eye health imposes a non-trivial recurring cost to the Indian economy equivalent to 0.47% to 0.70% of GDP in the primary scenario, a substantial constraint on the country's growth aspirations. The costs of poor eye health will increase over time as India ages and becomes wealthier unless further progress is made in reducing the prevalence of MSVI and blindness (Wong et al., 2019).

According to the estimates of the IAPB, vision loss costs the global economy \$411 billion every year in lost productivity alone (IAPB, 2021). Further, as almost everyone will need access to eye care services during their lifetime, the per annum productivity loss is only expected to increase, unless there is a significant investment in eye care services. Thus the SDG 1 of No Poverty is impacted since a person's impoverishment is both a cause and a consequence of poor eye health, and hence the poor and extremely poor are among the furthest left behind. Thus, the SDG objective of 'leaving no one behind' remains far-fetched.

Further, improved eye health increases access to wider and more frequent employment opportunities and subsequently increases household income and thereby reducing hunger and would contribute to the attainment of SDG 2 of Zero Hunger. It has been estimated that access to free and high-quality cataract surgeries can increase household income. For instance, 46% of households moved up an income bracket following cataract surgery (Friends of Vision and IAPB, 2021). This is true for India. For instance, the provision of free spectacles to tea workers with presbyopia in India improved workplace relative productivity (Reddy et al., 2018).

Implementing effective eye health services would be a way to break the negative cycle of poor eye health, which leads to poverty, leading to worse eye health, and thus more poverty (Marques et al., 2020).

It is clear that eye health is imperative for the overall good health, mental health, and complete well-being of an individual. Hence the challenges posed by poor eye health increase the risk of sicknesses and even mortality by up to 2.6 times (Wallace et al., 2020). In India, there is one ophthalmologist per 100,000 people. While around 70% of our population lives in villages, more than 90% of ophthalmologists live in cities. India also has a shortage of paramedics with less than 2 paramedics per ophthalmologist as against the WHO recommendation of 5 (Sabherwal, 2022). Thus, the SDG 3 of Good Health and Well-Being is impacted. The

effects of improved eye health cascade beyond poverty reduction, to achieve wider benefits, such as improved health and well-being (SDG 3), and education (SDG 4).

SDG 4 of Quality Education is contingent upon the eye and overall health of children and learners of all ages. Since vision is the foundation of a child's communication and learning skills and ability to become independent, therefore, there should be a strong focus on a vision for the children so that they can benefit from quality education. According to VISION 2020/IAPB, it is estimated that around 91 million children and adolescents worldwide have a vision impairment but do not have access to the eye care services they need, which leads to them being 2-5 times less likely to be formal education, especially in low- and middle-income countries. The COVID-19 pandemic-induced shifts in living standards and mode of education, have further increased the burden of children's eye care which risks the attainment of SDG 4 in a timely manner. Studies have shown how the provision of free spectacles to children is an inexpensive, simple intervention that can improve academic test scores and literacy skills, which in turn can improve future opportunities for decent work and paid employment.

A lack of access to eye care has a disproportionate impact on women and girls. This can have devastating consequences on girls' education, increase dropouts, exacerbate poverty and the occurrence of child marriage, and negatively impact the participation of women in the workforce and the role of women in safeguarding the health and education of their own children (Steinmetz et al. 2021). The Vision Loss Expert Group (VLEG) and Global Burden of Disease study (GBD) 2020 model (VLEG/GBD 2020 model) estimates that women and girls are 12% more likely than their male counterparts to have vision ailments and experience additional barriers in accessing eye care services. Thus, this puts the SDG 5 of Gender Equality at risk of being pushed to the margins.

SDG 8 calls for Decent Work and Economic Growth, the achievement of which can be constrained when employees do not have access to eye health care at the workplace. For instance, evidence from Kenya, The Philippines, and Bangladesh indicates that cataract surgeries can increase per capita household expenditure by 36%-88% (Kuper et al., 2010). Cataract surgeries if sponsored by employers could thus contribute to improvement in working and living standards. Findings from a study called PROSPER [PROductivity Study of Presbyopia Elimination in Rural-dwellers] further show that the provision of eyeglasses can increase workplace productivity by 22%, based on a trial of Indian tea workers with presbyopia (Reddy et al., 2018).

Studies have evidenced that socioeconomic status measured as lower incomes, lower educational status, or manual occupational social class is directly associated with the prevalence of blindness or visual impairment. Further, those living in rural areas are more likely to be associated with visual impairment and blindness (Ulldemolins, 2012). Thus, this exacerbates inequalities across several parameters. Thus, it needs to be ensured that eye care services should be accessible by all regardless of age, gender, race, caste, religion, location, or ability to pay. It is highly imperative to focus on eye care to improve our productivity and reduce the overall burden of healthcare on families as well as the economy at large so that we can move towards the attainment of the SDG 10 of Reduced Inequalities.

With growing urbanization and increasing population, there has been an increase in the number of vehicles on road. Eye health is essential for the achievement of SDG 11 of Sustainable Cities and Communities, which if ensured would be critical in reducing road traffic deaths and injuries. The VLEG/GBD 2020 model highlights that unoperated cataracts can increase the chance of a motor vehicle accident by 2.5 times, hence leading to further health challenges, disabilities, increased unplanned expenditures, and even mortalities. Vision impairment is not simply limited to visual acuity, but also includes visual field and color vision problems and impacts driving safety (Burton et al. 2020). Studies have demonstrated that cataract surgery reduced driving-related difficulties and motor vehicle collisions (Schelenker, 2018). Further, addressing this challenge would promote longevity and advance the pathways to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (Elrich et al., 2021).

Therefore, given the wide-reaching and intricate relationship between eye health and the growth and well-being of the populace, the issue must become a priority for policymakers, academics, civil societies and NGOs, and the private sector.

Eye Healthcare and Sustainable Development in India: Issues and Challenges

The Vision 2020: Right to Sight was launched as a collaborative movement by WHO and IAPB in the year 2000 and culminated in the year 2020. In 2007, there were an estimated 12 million blind people in India (Vision 2020 India Newsletter, 2007) and in 2019, the National Blindness and Visual Impairment Survey revealed that around 4.8 million people were estimated to be suffering from blindness in India (Sharma, 2019). On the face of it as the data shows, there is an impressive decline of 47% of blind people in the country with the implementation of a series of measures under the ongoing NPCBVI (Kumar and Vashishth, 2020). However, in absolute numbers, the number of people suffering from blindness continues to be large, along with the 34 million faced with other visual impairments in the country.

It is important to note that for the year 2020, IAPB, on the basis of the VLEG/GBD 2020 model, reports that in 2020 in India, there were an estimated 270 million people with vision loss, of which, 9.2 million people were blind.

As per the Status of Child Eye Health Report by Orbis (2020), the economic burden of visual impairment in India accounted for roughly Rs 88,900 crore in 2020. The loss in income due to blindness in adults is estimated to be Rs 9,06,200 crore and Rs 3,31,100 crore for children, for 10 and 40 lost working years, respectively. This clearly indicates the consequent implications of unplanned expenditures on eye health thereby creating financial challenges for the people. This implies that the realization of SDG 1 of No Poverty remains a distant dream and monetary challenges may translate into becoming a roadblock to the attainment of SDG 2 of Zero Hunger as well.

The report highlights that there are approximately 270,000 blind children in India, the largest in any country across the world. Given that the books and mode of teaching remain dependent on visual aspects, the achievement of the Right to Education objective of providing affordable and quality education becomes difficult (Goal: 4). While support in terms of Braille text, audio textbooks, special educators, among other tools are being undertaken, they are far from being ubiquitous.

Further, the COVID-19 induced challenges translated into the online mode of teaching-learning, which further alienated a large section of the student population due to the inability to afford smartphones, tablets, and laptops/computers. This also had another dimension of visual impairments, eye strain, and sleep disturbance for a large number of students who found themselves struggling to learn in front of a digital screen. Additional health concerns include mental health problems ranging from difficulties in concentration, obsession to diagnosable mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (Király et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2020; Stavridou et al., 2021). Hence, the SDG 4 of Quality Education is a challenge in India in the prevailing context.

India is making all efforts to attain Goal 5 of Gender Equality. However, when it comes to equitable and equal eye health care, women are found to be at a disadvantage, thus making it difficult to achieve Goal 5. For instance, it has been reported that Indian women are 69% more likely to develop a cataract than men and 35% more likely to go blind to it. They have had 27% lower odds of getting cataract surgery than men, which is a significant cause of the resulting blindness. Some of the reasons for this gender disparity are the high costs of cataract surgeries, loss of work for the patient and their attendant during the surgery, and unwillingness to a hospital stay following the surgery because women have low disposable income and less financial control over their household income, as well as gendered restrictions placed on traveling outside villages and lack of community awareness about the procedure (Prasad, et al. 2020; Pant et al., 2017).

These further increases other disparities across age, geography, income, and other socio-economic categories and impact the attainment of Goal 10 of Reduced Inequalities. For instance, according to the National Blindness and Visual Impairment Survey India 2015-2019 (2019), the prevalence of blindness is highest among those who are at least 80 years old (11.6%). India, with a per capita public expenditure on health of just over 3% of GDP, lags behind the WHO recommendation for countries to spend 4-5% of their GDP on health to achieve universal healthcare. Thus, by ensuring a larger and a dedicated budget for eye health care, India could ensure making eye care a priority with a focus on the prevention and treatment of eye diseases, and rehabilitation, in order to converge with the United Nations resolution on “Vision for Everyone: accelerating action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” (UN General Assembly, 2021).

Mapping Sustainable Development Goals and Eye Care

According to the Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health, eye health is defined as the state when vision, ocular health, and functional ability are maximized, which then contributes to overall health and wellbeing, social inclusion, and quality of life (Burton et al., 2021). Thus, impaired eye health negatively impacts the quality of life, an important measure of physical, emotional, and social well-being of the affected people, and also represents a major public health challenge, and is thus a substantial barrier to sustainable development (Assi, 2021). Lower quality of life has been evidenced due to vision impairment, age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, or Mendelian eye conditions (including retinitis pigmentosa) (ibid).

It is simple and needs no explanation that eye health is intertwined with the overall health and well-being of an individual or with achieving the SDG 3 of Good Health and Well-Being. Promoting eye health and nuanced eye health policies and services not just helps those who are affected and enhances their functional ability but also leads to the advancement of multiple SDGs. These policies and services encompass the whole range of interventions that improve eye health, including promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation (WHO, 2019).

For the poverty-related SDGs (1, 2, and 8), studies show that the main pathways by which eye health services contribute to the advancement of these SDGs are through improvement in one or more of workplace productivity, household per capita expenditure, household income, employment rates, and economic productivity. For education (SDG 4), eye health services were found to contribute to improved academic test scores. This also drives SDG 9 by fostering greater innovation and contributes to the expansion of the industries and as well as infrastructure and by increased participation of the people there. For equality (SDGs 5 and 10), eye health services eliminated gaps in per capita expenditure. For sustainable cities (SDG 11), eye health services were found to reduce driving-related difficulties and motor vehicle crashes.

The major Goals that are directly impacted by the nature of eye health of the people include 1 (No poverty); 2 (Zero hunger); 3 (Good health and well-being); 4 (Quality education); 5 (Gender equality); 8 (Decent work and economic growth), and 10 (Reducing inequality) and 10 and 11 (industry, innovation, infrastructure and sustainable cities). The diagrammatic representation in Figure 1 below showcases the direct interlinkages between eye health and SDGs.

Figure 1: Interlinkages between eye health and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Some public interventions that are feasible and would lead to the advancement of the aforementioned goals are given in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Feasible Public Interventions towards Attainment of SDGs

(Adapted from Global Eye Health: vision beyond 2020)

Cataract Surgery	SDG 1: NO POVERTY	SDG 2: ZERO HUNGER	SDG 8: DECENT WORK & ECONOMIC GROWTH	SDG 9: INDUSTRY, INNOVATION & INFRASTRUCTURE	SDG 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES & COMMUNITIES
Free Spectacles	SDG 1: NO POVERTY	SDG 2: ZERO HUNGER	SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION	SDG 8: DECENT WORK & ECONOMIC GROWTH	SDG 9: INDUSTRY, INNOVATION & INFRASTRUCTURE
Specialized Schools	SDG 1: NO POVERTY	SDG 2: ZERO HUNGER	SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION	SDG 8: DECENT WORK & ECONOMIC GROWTH	
Low-cost Eye Services	SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION	SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY	SDG 9: INDUSTRY, INNOVATION & INFRASTRUCTURE	SDG 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES	
Regular Eye Check-ups	SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION	SDG 8: DECENT WORK & ECONOMIC GROWTH	SDG 9: INDUSTRY, INNOVATION & INFRASTRUCTURE	SDG 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES	

An Assessment of the Eye Care Sector for Enabling Sustainable Development in India: Focusing on *Leaving No One Behind*

NITI Aayog's SDG India Index and Dashboard 2020-21 delineates Indian States' and Union Territories' performance and progress under 16 Goals. The Index scores them between 0-100. Overall, the country's SDG score improved by 6 points—from 60 in 2019 to 66 in 2020-21, driven by Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) corresponding to 83 and 92 respectively. This is represented in Figure 3 below:

Mizoram, Haryana, and Uttarakhand are the top gainers in 2020-21 in terms of improvement in score from 2019, with an increase of 12, 10, and 8 points, respectively.

Figure 3: Goal-wise India results, SDG India Index 2019-20 and 2020-21



Source: Press Information Bureau (PIB), 2021
Figure 4: Goal-wise Top States/UTs, SDG India Index 2019-20 and 2020-21



Source: PIB, 2021

India's progress towards SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing from 2019 to 2020 presents a promising picture and provides a basis to further India's efforts towards enhancing eye care systems, being the primary goal connecting investment in eye care with the attainment of SDGs. A sustained focus on eye health in policymaking will certainly contribute its bit towards SDG 3 and other goals.

India's results for SDG 2: Zero Hunger are concerning, with its attainment being the farthest among all 17 goals. A focus on improving eye health is imperative, for providing more and wider employment opportunities, increasing household income, and reducing hunger and deprivation.

India's performance towards SDG 1: No Poverty, SDG 4: Quality Education, and SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, among others, demands further improvement as well. As highlighted in this article, investment in eye care is intricately connected to the attainment of these goals and must be prioritized in light of these results.

Conclusions

With the above description, it is evident that urgent policy intervention is needed for creating integrated people-centered eye care, embedded in health systems and based on strong primary health care, and scaled and decentralized to the grassroots level in the country. Emphasis on eye care in local governance -especially at the district level - is of paramount importance for effective implementation.

We recommend periodic cataract surgery programs and public eye health initiatives- even basic awareness programs for different age and gender cohorts. It is important that public health experts and community ophthalmology practitioners must consider targeting women and the elderly in efforts to curb blindness and evaluate local barriers to availing services. Further, the socio-economic barriers that prevent women from seeking eye care must be comprehensively explored and appropriately acted upon.

A key strategy to augment eye health that advances the attainment of the SDGs is to invest in human resource development, in particular the development of midlevel ophthalmic personnel, and training for the integration of primary eye care into primary health care.

We make a clarion call for the accessibility, availability, and affordability of quality eye care services across all geographical and socio-economic parameters. For this, it is important to ensure appropriate and timely investment in eye care and awareness among the masses in terms of prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. Further, these suggestions build upon the objectives and new focus areas of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's National Programme for Control of Blindness and Visual Impairment.

To conclude, if this decade is truly to be the Decade of Action for the SDGs, eye health services must be fully mainstreamed into universal health coverage, and community-based eye health services led by well-trained multi-disciplinary teams (Webson, 2021). The findings of this study suggest and reiterate that a renewed approach toward the 2030 Agenda requires a focus on eye care, which will also enhance the well-being and capabilities of the population. Towards this, political

will and effective participation of all relevant stakeholders are needed, which will tackle current needs, and assess and address future demands of the population.

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Special Article

Gendering Covid-19: *Impact and Strategies towards Gender Inclusive Recovery*

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated inequalities of various kinds through the deadly impact of lockdowns, quarantines, and the resurgence of various strains of the novel coronavirus. In addition to challenging global health systems, it has aggravated the existing gender disparities across the globe which has significant implications for women. The current paper looks at some of the prominent impacts of the pandemic on women in the Indian context from a gendered lens. It also suggests gender-inclusive strategies to deal with the emerging challenges in the post-COVID scenario.

Keywords: Gender; Women; COVID-19; Pandemic

Introduction

“The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic”

(UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, April 2020).

The year 2020 made a milestone year for gender equality owing to the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, the most comprehensive and transformative global agenda for the achievement of gender equality. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caught the entire world unaware and unprepared and jolted everyone across the globe, bringing everything to a standstill with incomparable changes across the world.

The pandemic not only halted the slow but steady tramp towards gender equality across the globe but also exacerbated the already existing gender inequalities and reversed the hard-won advances towards the accomplishment of goals. While the world became familiar with “stay-at-home” and “lockdown” orders

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that were adopted as unprecedented measures to keep everyone safe amidst the coronavirus pandemic, another “Shadow Pandemic” emerged along with the growing evidence of the impact of Covid-19 on women and girls.

As on 21st February 2022, COVID-19 has impacted more than 424 million cases across the world, with more than 42.8 million affected in India. The Lockdowns and the varied phases of ‘Unlock’ in India amidst the various variants of the deadly virus have impacted everyone in overt as well as covert ways. While most sectors of the economy have already become functional, there are still fears, and doubts in the minds of people owing to the recurrent news related to reinfections and the discovery of newer strains of the virus. While most people have moved out of the comfort of their homes amidst the diminishing numbers of active cases since the ebbing of the third wave in the country, the pandemic has left those vulnerable, still feeling numb and lost due to their helplessness, caregiving responsibilities, relapse of illnesses or even loss of loved ones.

For women and girls, simply by virtue of their sex, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated across every sphere of society, from health to the economy, security to social protection (United Nations, 2020). The UN Report on COVID-19 and girls and women (2020) termed Covid-19 as a ‘Shadow Pandemic’ due to:

“the spike in domestic violence as girls and women are sheltering-in-place with their abusers; the loss of employment for women who hold the majority of insecure, informal and low paying jobs; the risk shouldered by the world’s nurses, who are predominantly women; and the rapid increase in unpaid care work that girls and women provide already”.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also deepened the ‘crisis of care’ (Fraser 2016), or of social reproduction in a broader sense, which lies at the foundation of the economy, society, and households, enabling structures and institutions to function. Women and girls are particularly deprived during the crisis due to unequal structures, power relations, and social norms that prevent them from accessing basic services, including healthcare and education, and participating in decision-making processes that affect their lives (Dugarova, 2020).

Presented below is an account of the impact of Covid 19 Pandemic on women from a gender lens:

1. Increased domestic responsibilities

Before COVID-19 became a universal pandemic, globally women performed on an average of three-quarters, or 76.4 percent of the total amount of unpaid care of work (Charmes, 2019). According to the “Time to Care” report by Oxfam (2020), women and girls spent 3.26 billion hours of unpaid care work each and every day, making a contribution to the Indian economy of Rupees 19 lakh crore per year, which is equivalent to 20 times the entire education budget of India. In the context of our country, Indian women do nearly six hours of unpaid care work every day as compared to men who spend less than an hour per day.

Lockdowns and self-quarantine measures across the world increased women's workload manifold as more people were home-bound than ever before for a very lengthy and continued period of time. As a consequence, of the abrupt shutting of offices and educational institutions, and the resultant Work From Home (WFH) and online education, women's unremunerated chores in the household increased significantly. With the heavily toppled daily schedules of the family members and, the lack of services for domestic help, the pandemic has left women distressed. Also, the widespread closure of schools and childcare facilities has led to 'homeschooling', a new task that seems to be being taken primarily by women (Dugarova, 2020).

Owing to the gendered expectations and sexual division of labor, women found themselves toiling for long hours each day in taking care of the domestic work as well as attending to the individual needs of their family members. The same continues to be recurring even though educational institutions are gradually opening up and many schools and colleges have started classes in the 'hybrid mode'. Furthermore, being the primary caregivers in most families, it is the women who have continued to indulge in *Looking after* providing emotional comfort and, friendship, conveying empathy to the children, spouses, elderly (with or without co-morbidities) and other family members stuck at home. Thus, the heightened demand for caregiving has actually excavated the already existing inequalities in the gender division of labor. It may be noted that these responsibilities can take a toll and become more difficult during certain phases of women's lives including pregnancy, post-partum, perimenopause / menopause, menstruation, etc. Unpaid care work requires a lot of physical, mental, and emotional effort. It is also costly in terms of time utilization, and if outsourced to someone outside the family, it would involve financial payment for performing those chores. Already overburdened, when stretched, these are bound to be an overarching impact on the mental health of women and have psychological consequences.

2. Work from Home and job losses

According to the policy brief by ILO (2021), globally, women have been disproportionately hit in terms of job losses: 4.2% of women's employment was destroyed as a result of the pandemic compared to 3% of men's employment. In the context of urban locales, more than ever before, Work From Home (WFH) became a buzzword during the pandemic. For women in paid employment, the drudgery of unpaid work becomes higher as they work longer than men owing to the triple burdens of unpaid work, reproductive work, and paid employment (Chauhan, 2020). This becomes particularly intricate and pressurizing particularly for women with small children, or the school-going ones who are now having online classes and have their own emotional pressures and psychosocial concerns. It also affects women who are engaged in elderly care. While both partners are trying to juggle WFH, issues related to looking after the

kids, and attending to their needs with respect to having timely meals, feeding, bathing, homework, and sleeping schedules become a major source of concern. Thus, most women working from home, found spreading themselves thin while bearing the responsibilities of the household, while expected to efficiently handle their professional responsibilities.

Furthermore, the pressure to survive, to keep the job going, and to get a salary at the end of each month has been very important because of heavy retrenchment across all sectors. One in four women considered downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce entirely because of the impact of COVID-19 (World Economic Forum, 2020). The pandemic has also seen many people being laid off. According to a report released by McKinsey and Company (2020), women have lost twice as many jobs as men during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, WFH also took a psychological toll on women. The time women got away from the house, the physical, psychological, and intellectual space they got away from the house vanished. While the school teachers (usually females) are toiling towards online classes during the day, they are slogging to look after the administrative and Co-Curricular activities of the school- preparing e-newsletters, online debates, creative competitions- Intra and inter-liaison school work, examination work-paper setting, evaluation in addition to attending the frequent online staff meetings at odd hours.

Women in leadership/ administrative positions are also stressed out as they have to work from home without assistance from any support staff with piles and piles of reports to be prepared and compiled every day, Monday to Sunday, 24*7 with all the deadlines having stringent timeframe. Women in the Corporate sector have been constantly busy with their Online Meetings that are scattered from 9 AM and went way beyond 11 PM. Since everyone 'worked from home', time was said to be *Flexi* which in reality, has been highly inflexible and torturous for women who treaded on thin lines with many on the verge of mental break-up.

The psychological consequence of WFH has been visible in the form of personal and professional lives becoming deeply enmeshed and entangled. Work-from-home culture also took away the freedom, sense of empowerment, and the *Me-Time* for most women. With the novel coronavirus having completed two years, its toll on mental health has been distinctly visible. While the workplace can be a huge positive reinforcement for one's intellect, independent identity, and economic self-sufficiency, when un-balanced, intruding and encroaching in one's personal space, especially when children are involved, there has been an increase in what has been called as the "mom guilt" - this is the guilt that mothers feel for being inadequate or having to divide their time between child-rearing and other commitments. This has deeper mental health consequences and often impacts parent-child and also familial relationships. All these negatively impact the mental health of women even further.

3. Violence against women and girls

UN Women report (2020) stated that violence against women and girls is likely to be “*the lasting legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic*”. Even before the pandemic, it was estimated that one in three women experienced violence during their lifetimes. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a global increase in violence against women and girls as it coincided with economic and social stresses and measures to restrict contact and movement of people. Crowded homes, substance abuse, limited access to services, and reduced peer support further exacerbated these conditions. Many women were trapped in their homes with their abusers (United Nations, 2020). Violence against women, as a human rights violation, has severe and long-term impacts on victims or survivors, their families, and communities. Confined living conditions and tensions generated by the concerns related to security, health, and finances plus the pent-up emotions and energies led to massive reporting amidst the hugely underreported or unreported incidents during the pandemic. Violent partners used confinement to further exercise power and control.

At the same time, women have less income, fewer opportunities for social contact, and limited access to services and community support, all of which gave them fewer exit options. With more people staying at home, families spend more time in close contact, including in cramped conditions, disruption of livelihoods, reduced or no access to basic needs and services, and no opportunity for channelizing the energy or sharing the frustrations or catharsis; led to an increase in varied forms of violence- verbal, physical, emotional, intellectual, financial, social. Newspapers during the Lockdown reported about cases of pregnant women who were beaten to death (*The Times of India* dated 25 September 2020) or news like a wife beating her husband in an online Ludo game which actually led to wife battery and her consequent death (*The Hindustan Times*, 28 April 2020).

Family members may use deliberate and neglectful tactics to exert power, including continuously finding fault with them, belittling their effort, refusing access to jointly owned money, and threatening to cause harm. Lack of or the loss of financial independence keeps women bound to relationships. In addition, there is limited and restricted movement due to COVID-19, inadequate decision-making capacity, and lowered social bargaining power and these threaten their safety and autonomy at home.

In addition to the intimate partner violence, there were reports about incidents of rape at the Quarantine Centres (*The Hindu* dated 18th July 2020) and hospitals which again shows the vulnerability of women and their objectification even when they were Covid Positive. Such incidents impact the dignity, self-worth, self-confidence, and self-esteem of women and have far-reaching consequences on women’s mental health.

4. Women in the informal economy

“Covid-19 has pummelled feminized labor sections” (UN Women, 2020). With nearly 70% of women working in the informal economy (ILO, 2018) across the globe, they earned less, saved less, held less secure jobs, had less access to social protections, and were the majority of single-parent households. Their capacity to absorb economic shocks has been therefore less than that of men (United Nations, 2020). Many of them in the Indian context, worked in the fields as farmers, or have been engaged in home-based works like *bindi/ choori* making / embroidery/ tying and dying of clothes/ garment making. Many also worked as construction workers, domestic helpers, ran petty businesses, or even worked as vendors.

The pandemic led to their sudden unemployment and in many cases reverse migration also took place. With no livelihood or basic social security measures, their future has turned bleak even now when the Indian economy has opened up. It is also observed that it is more men than women have returned to work even in the informal sector. With the closure of schools, and uncertainty looming large, many women are at home and engaged in looking after their children and families. With plummeting economic activity, women have been particularly vulnerable to layoffs and loss of livelihoods. Furthermore, the incomes of women working in the informal sector have also declined dramatically (UN Women, 2020).

5. Reproductive and Child Health risks of Covid-19

Another very pertinent and extremely significant COVID-19 impact is the risks and dangers it has posed to women and girls with respect to their reproductive health. According to United Nations (2020):

“Women and girls have unique health needs, but they are less likely to have access to quality health services, essential medicines, and vaccines, maternal and reproductive health care, or insurance coverage for routine and catastrophic health costs, especially in rural and marginalized communities”

Due to the prevalent culture of silence, women have never been at the forefront of receiving the RCH and RSH services. The pandemic led to the health system diverting resources from general health to Covid Care. For example, in the National Capital of Delhi, 80% of the ICU beds in hospitals were reserved as ‘Corona beds’ during the surge in cases. With the major health facilities converted to Covid Care Facilities (totally or partially), the health of women generally has been adversely impacted through the reallocation of resources and priorities, including sexual and reproductive health services. These have led to gross neglect in meeting the RCH/ RSH needs of women that may result in exacerbated maternal mortality and morbidity, increased rates of unwanted pregnancies, HIV, and sexually transmitted diseases.

The COVID-19 pandemic has particularly impacted the needs of pregnant women (Ante Natal Women, women needing safe deliveries) and those needing Post-natal care. Their rights regarding availing family planning services, gynaecological check-

ups, safe abortions, menstrual health supplies like sanitary napkins, clean clothes, and tampons, and maternal health care services like immunizations for children have been severely impacted, particularly during the lockdowns. All these Sexual and Reproductive and Child health services were sadly overlooked in the Corona crisis due to the reallocation of staff and resources that were geared towards these essential and critical care services for women.

Thus, it was no surprise when the newspapers reported regarding women delivering children on roads, in *Shramik* trains, and also about neonatal deaths. Even now when general OPDs in hospitals have gradually opened up, ASHA workers getting back to the work, and women are scared, shy, and embarrassed to go to avail RCH/RSH facilities. There is still fear of contracting infection, which further perpetuates isolation, violence, feelings of shame, and lowered self-worth and therefore heightening the risks to women's mental health and overall well-being.

6. Impact on the education of girls

Plan International in its report "Living Under Lockdown" (2020) analyzed the impact of how the COVID-19 pandemic on girls around the world, and also examined past crises to understand the current risks. With schools shut down around the world to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, girls are missing out on learning opportunities and are more likely to experience violence and abuse at home, unplanned pregnancies, child marriage, and economic hardship. At the end of March 2020, around 743 million girls were out of school and many girls may never return to class, the report said.

Recent data shows that adolescent girls spend significantly more hours on chores compared to their male counterparts (UNICEF, Plan International, and UN Women, 2020). School closures do not just mean that girls are taking on more chores at home, it could also lead to millions more girls dropping out of school before they complete their education, especially girls living in poverty, girls with disabilities, or living in rural, isolated locations.

7. Women under Difficult Circumstances

The pandemic also has negatively impacted various other categories of women who in many ways are more vulnerable and reeling under difficult circumstances. These include women who are single parents, those heading their households, trafficked women, sex workers, women living in institutional facilities, women with disabilities, women with chronic mental illnesses, elderly women, etc.

Mental health consequences of COVID-19 on women

During the pandemic, women have continued to provide essential work in the health and social work sector as well as in other essential occupations, often putting their

own lives at risk and facing a double burden: longer shifts at work and additional care work at home (ILO, 2021). Furthermore, unpaid care work, enhanced domestic responsibilities, WFH, Layoffs for women, Violence against women and girls, and other challenges have major mental health consequences for women.

While gender-disaggregated data emanating from research is awaited from most countries, pandemics, including COVID-19, have been shown to have major effects on mental health resulting in anxiety, depression, and high-stress levels (Wang et al., 2020). Physical distancing and stay-at-home orders have had larger implications for women in every sphere of their lives. According to a report by the Guardian Weekly, 6 out of 10 women said they were finding it hard to stay positive day-to-day, compared with just under half of men. Half of the women shared that they were very concerned about the risk the virus posed to the country, compared with a third of men. It was also found that women were more likely than men to have helped others during the pandemic.

Nanjundaswamy et al. (2020) reported concerns and anxieties about the impact of COVID-19 infection on pregnancy and the unborn child among pregnant mothers who indeed are a vulnerable section of the population during the pandemic. With anxiety topping the minds of pregnant women and young mothers, the epidemic is changing the already particular practices of perinatal psychiatry with newer forms of multidisciplinary support being imagined and created (Gressier et al., 2020). For those already coping with these concerns, experience worsening of their own mental health with symptoms that may include negative self-perception, persistently feeling low/ anxious/feelings of emptiness or hollowness, erratic moods, inability to experience pleasure, difficulty with attention/memory, changes in appetite and sleep, fatigue, bodily pains and thoughts of self-harm and even suicide.

Women trapped in an escalating cycle of tension, power, and control, and they are very vulnerable to experiencing varied mental health concerns, including depression, anxiety, and trauma. Stigma and lack of access to social support during the pandemic can aggravate or lead to the internalization of abuse. They may direct their anger, humiliation, and fear toward themselves or those who are dependent which will in turn give guilt and further aggravate their feelings of worthlessness and helplessness. This may also result in trauma bonding. If a woman experiences abuse from a partner who also expresses love, they learn to associate love with abuse. They often rationalize, justify or minimize the abuse and are less likely to report it. The issues become more intricate for women with pre-existing mental health conditions.

After assessing the broad impact and challenges of COVID-19 on women, presented below are strategies to deal with the gender-based challenges in the post-Covid scenario:

Gender inclusive strategies for closing gender gaps in the post-pandemic world

- **Need for gendered disaggregated data and continued monitoring**

The first and foremost step to close the gender gaps in the post-COVID-19 world would be to include women's perspectives in pandemic planning and decision-making. There is a critical need for the gendered disaggregated data for each and every domain viz. number of infections, recoveries, deaths, school dropouts, and layoffs across the medical, social, and economic sectors. It is crucial to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls for effective planning and implementation of effective policy measures.

There is also a need to study the impact of the pandemic on women and have a gender perspective in terms of undertaking quantitative as well as qualitative research with the inclusion and participation of grassroots women. A study of women across all sectors is required e.g., the impact of Covid-19 on female students, teachers, homemakers, women in higher leadership, women in the informal as well as the economy, etc. In addition, the inclusion of men and trans persons too is needed to gain a holistic view from a gendered lens.

Thus, continued monitoring of the pandemic's differentiated impacts on women and men can enable determining additional measures needed for the inclusion of women in the post-pandemic gender-specific strategies. Investing in good data governance and infrastructure can improve access to timely and disaggregated data, including sex- and/or gender-disaggregated data, as well as other identifying factors, and enable governments to tap into innovative sources of data to support more gender-inclusive policy responses (OECD, 2021).

- **Integrating gender equality into recovery strategies**

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres thrust on "putting the women and girls at the center of efforts that begin with women as leaders, with equal representation and decision-making power. He also states that Covid-19 could reverse the limited but important progress made on gender equality and women's rights". The United Nations (2020) has stressed on the

- a) Inclusion of women and women's organizations at the heart of the COVID-19 response
- b) Transforming the inequities of unpaid care work into a new, inclusive care economy that works for everyone
- c) Designing socio-economic plans with an intentional focus on the lives and futures of women and girls.

Keeping women at the center stage of the post-pandemic recovery planning and execution, governments must consider taking their own approaches to incorporate gender equality considerations into their strategies e.g., gender budgeting can be used to acquire information on how policy measures in the post-pandemic world can contribute towards gender equality goals, to be provided alongside proposals for fiscal recovery packages (OECD, 2021).

- **Gender-responsive budgeting for an Inclusive Job-Rich Recovery**

Efforts should be directed towards putting in place gender-responsive strategies aiming at full, productive, and freely chosen employment and decent work for all, with a focus on the needs of the most vulnerable and hardest hit by the pandemic. An equitable and job-rich recovery, non-discriminatory labor markets, and care-inclusive economies are the only pathway to build resilience to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO, 2021). Gender-responsive budgeting is a strategic approach to operationalizing and monitoring gender-responsive COVID-19 policies. It provides a framework with specific tools to be applied at each stage of the public finance management cycle for planning, budgeting, executing, and evaluating budget performance from a gender perspective (IMF 2021).

- **Designing effective policy responses**

In addition to developing Gender Responsive Budgeting, Ex ante Gender Impact Assessments (GIA) can improve the formulation and prioritization of policies by identifying intended and unintended effects on gender equality. Ex-ante GIA is the estimation of the different impacts (positive, negative, or neutral) of a policy proposal on gender equality. They can be conducted on policies that are specifically aimed at tackling gender gaps but can also highlight unintended bias in non-gender specific programs or policies, for instance during episodes of fiscal consolidation (IMF, 2021).

- **Supporting and Strengthening Women in the Informal Economy**

There is a need to set up a task force of expert professionals involving members from the grassroots level e.g., trade union and cooperative representatives, members of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and their federations, PRI members, NGOs, researchers and academics, and of course, government representatives from the states and the center. There is a need to prepare and analyze Pre-Corona, During-Corona, and Post-Corona data from a gender lens with regard to compiling the learning insights gained from the pandemic, and deliberating on decentralized and simple implementation mechanisms. There is an urgent need to work out and expand inclusive social protection for women in the informal economy in order to enable them and support them to revive their livelihoods.

- **Enabling women's participation in the labor force**

There is a need to enable women's participation in the labor force through flexible work arrangements that support diverse workforces including formal as well as informal work spheres. Social safety nets, specifically in the provision of childcare

support, should be enhanced to enable women to come back/ retain their employment.

- **Closing the gender digital divide**

There is a stringent need to make women digitally more literate and enhancement of technical skills among women. More than ever before, technology is going to be at the core of our “new normal” and bridging the digital gap to increase the chances of girls and women accessing education and jobs. This requires the engagement of the government along with partnering NGOs with thrust on the involvement of women.

As the economy has opened, creating accessible information portals on job availability would help both men and women match with potential employers, in urban as well as rural areas. Those most digitally agile have been able to cope with the crisis better, and the use of digital technologies has been essential to democratic participation; access to public services and public transfers; employment opportunities; access to health; finance; social capital and networks; and even preventing or escaping from gender-based violence. Closing the gender digital divide can then contribute to maintaining livelihoods, ensuring economic safety nets, and even saving lives (IMF, 2021).

- **Dealing with Violence against women**

Dealing with the problem of gender-based violence (GBV) would indeed be a long-drawn process. In the short term, there is a need to strengthen and support peer-support groups for survivors of violence in order to help women recover from the trauma of abuse, direct or vicarious. Also, it is imperative to bring men into the conversation because the involvement of men is very crucial e.g., having an enhanced focus on positive masculinities, sharing household responsibilities, and supporting women. UN’s document on the ‘Decision Tree’ with the usage of existing data, recording of VAW in the Pre/ During and Post Covid times, mapping of services for women affected by violence, and actionable pointers is an excellent step towards the same.

- **Provision of health services**

Health systems need to be prepared for providing essential support to survivors of gender-based violence, rehauling sexual and reproductive healthcare services, and legal aid. With the help of the grassroots functionaries, there is a need to intensify these efforts and reallocate resources towards RCH and RSH services for women. Awareness campaigns are needed for the identification of women with special needs e.g., expectant mothers, those requiring PNC, safe deliveries, specific health conditions, mental health needs, etc.

- **Developing a culture of Shared Care**

In the context of unburdening women, there needs to be a Re-orientation of the domestic space with efforts towards unlearning the gendered hierarchies of labor owing to gender socialization and social conditioning. Sharing of caregiving roles along with the domestic work and emotional labor between partners as well as children (if possible) can be deliberated among the family members. This requires the involvement of families, communities as well as schools to challenge the age-old gender-based stereotypes and practices.

- **Digital Help for Mental Well-Being**

During the pandemic, online and ICT-facilitated services or digital services for help and support have increased e.g., Tele psychiatry being run by NIMHANS, NGOs. Again, gender perspective has to be brought in. The gendered perspective towards helping women to access and avail such services at their grassroots for enhancing their mental health is significant.

Conclusion

While the world continues to grapple with the disruptive reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to analyze in-depth its impact on women and girls. Gender-sensitive and inclusive strategies will be needed to battle the aftermath of the pandemic with the active engagement of multiple stakeholders. The gender-responsive country as well as state policies are being demanded by feminists. These entail focusing on a gendered analysis of caregiving work, reducing self-deprivation among women, combating and preventing gender-based violence, bridging the gender gap in digital literacy, reducing unemployment, social protection for women farmers, regulation of microfinance institutions (MFIs) to make them gender-friendly, and action against predatory MFI activities, enhancing women's resilience in response to climate change as significant actionable goals (Patel, 2022).

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**Towards New India:
*Logistics Policy the Ideal Ally of PM GatiShakti***

Kushagra Khatri

Abstract

The main drivers of a rapidly growing economy are infrastructure and logistics. Correspondingly India has launched PM Gati Shakti - National Master Plan for Multi-modal Connectivity in 2021 and the National Logistics Policy in 2022. This article seeks to address the use and utility of improving infrastructure and logistics for a country. Further highlighting the issues which have plagued the sectors and impeded the economic growth of the country. Moving on to the policies, firstly for the method, showing how both the policies latch on to the digitalization bandwagon and seek to uproot these issues. And secondly, the institutional framework is put in place to formulate, monitor, and evaluate the steps and measures taken.

Keywords: Infrastructure; Logistics; PM Gati Shakti; National Logistics Policy; E-Governance, New India; Technology; Governance;

Introduction

India is the world's fifth-largest economy by nominal GDP and is one of the fastest-growing economies. The main drivers of a rapidly growing economy are infrastructure and logistics. Infrastructure, being the bedrock of a modern economy, is a tangible parameter to measure the degree of development. Infrastructure is simply defined as the services or facilities a country creates to enhance the quality of life of its citizens. A packed buzzword that encompasses housing, transportation, energy, and manufacturing industries, along with communication technologies. The importance of logistics in enabling resilient and inclusive growth cannot be overlooked. Logistics can be defined as the "art of managing the flow of goods and services from source to user." A broad term that refers to the planning, implementation, and management of the movement of goods and services from a point of origin to a point of consumption.

For the policies, National Master Plan for Multi-modal Connectivity - Gati Shakti envisions a digital platform that will bring sixteen ministries together for integrated planning and coordinated implementation of infrastructure connectivity projects for industrial clusters and economic nodes. Creating a common platform for

ministries whose work often overlaps makes way for faster, seamless, and meticulous construction of infrastructure.

The National Logistics Policy is a unified policy that binds the procedures and processes in the field of logistics together. The policy sets measurable goals in reducing transportation costs, and improving international rankings and incorporating effective implementation. Riding on the tide of digitization, the policy works towards ease of transportation for India Inc.

In tandem with the PM Gati Shakti - National Master Plan, the logistics policy seeks to improve India's trade competitiveness, create jobs, and lay out the vision for India to become a logistics hub.

Positive Spillover Effects

An efficient infrastructure increases investments harbors innovations and uplifts many from poverty. The immediate direct result is increased demand for construction materials and job creation, but in the long run, it ensures higher employment sustainability and uninterrupted economic growth. S&P Global Ratings highlights a direct correlation between infrastructure spending and economic benefits by postulating that spending of 1% of GDP results in an increment of GDP by 2%. This is also corroborated by studies by the Reserve Bank of India and the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, which estimate at least 2.5-3.5 times the multiplier effect.

Efficiency in infrastructure mandates smooth-flowing logistical backing. Acknowledging this interdependence and actively streamlining it is a key prerequisite for ambitious countries like ours. Complementing PM GatiShakti, the National Logistics Policy (NLP) is concerned with developing digital services and an institutional structure that enables simplification of the logistics ecosystem in India.

Issues

India, after 75 years of independence, is a 3 trillion dollar economy and one of the fastest-growing in the world. It is the 5th largest economy in the world, but in the World Competitiveness Ranking 2022, it was ranked 37th and performed deplorably in the infrastructure vertical, ranking 49th. This brings forth the lack of basic infrastructural facilities. It is estimated that inadequate infrastructure pulls down annual GDP growth by 1-2%. High growth in the economy in recent years has enlarged this deficit as well as the need to fill it.

Currently, the cost of logistics in the economy is estimated to be 14% of the GDP, compared to the global average of 8%. This creates a \$180 billion competitiveness gap for India. The NLP aims to address this by reducing the cost-to-GDP ratio to a unit figure (less than 10%) by 2030. Reducing time and money spent on transport will translate into improved competitiveness of Indian goods and services, increasing exports, and accelerating growth. Efficient logistics is a growth driver in a developing economy like India.

The vast hinterlands capable of industrialization are marked by a shortfall of connectivity, a paucity or absence of utilities, and a missing regulatory environment that fosters competitiveness. The structural challenges that the GatiShakti plan directly confronts are:

Disjointed Planning: In a country as vast as India, it is an arduous task to foresee the challenges of tomorrow. But with the advent of the information age, it is baffling that we still find roads laid before sewage systems were put in. GatiShakti comes in to counter such incidents of disconnection and distance between the numerous agencies, saving funds and expediting the construction.

Under-utilization: A project is never standalone. It was observed that in some instances, a completed project was not fully utilized due to a lack of coordination among the different implementing authorities and ill-conceived planning. GatiShakti strives to align project timelines in order to minimize resource waste.

Multifarious Clearances and Approvals: A large-scale project involves various verticals, from land acquisition and forest and environmental clearances to the shifting of utilities (water and power lines). Such endeavors demand clear coordination among the ministries and departments. The plan aims to streamline the clearance procedure by clearly laying out standards and chains of command.

Technology Infusion

The NLP also launched a new platform, the Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP), which will bring all the digital services related to the transportation sector into a single portal. It consists of 3 components: integration of data sources from ministries; data exchange with private players; unified document reference in the supply chain. Bringing real-time information and data together on a single platform simplifies, improves efficiency, and increases transparency.

The e-marketplace Ease of Logistics platform facilitates EXIM logistics by bringing service seekers and service providers onto a single platform. The new portal lubricates the process of container demand in a systematic manner with provisions for exporters to post their requirements, thus linking exporters with logistic service providers.

As pointed out by the PM in his speech, the government of India's various other initiatives complements the goals of NLP. In pursuing simplification of procedures and processes, the introduction of the E-way bill in the GST regime removes the bottlenecks of checkpoints; eSanchit-ICEGATE enables faster customs clearances, and FASTag facilitates stopless movement. The amalgamation of digital space with the physical interface in facilitating seamless and faster movement of goods is a common thread running through all three.

The Digital Master Planning tool is the hub where all the ministries will update their data periodically for planning, review, and monitoring. The tool was developed by BISAG-N (Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geoinformatics) and has been prepared on the dynamic Geographic Information System (GIS) platform.

Plan of Action

The PM, when launching the plan, said, "With the whole-of-government approach, the collective power of the government is being channelled into fulfilling the schemes." The institutional framework is the manifestation of this vision. For the implementation of GatiShakti, a 3-tier institutional framework has been created under the logistics division of the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS): The EGoS is to be headed by the cabinet secretary and have other secretaries as members. The committee is responsible for monitoring and approving any changes to the Master Plan.

Network Planning Group (NPG): The group is responsible for unified planning and integration of the proposals. It will guide the heads of all network planning departments responsible for economic zones, connectivity, and infrastructural development. The Group serves as a platform for dialogue and coordination, horizontally aligning planning and execution.

Technical Support Unit (TSU): Primarily tasked with providing technical assistance to the planning group. The TSU will consist of 14 subject experts across 4 dimensions, namely integration, optimization, standardization, and digitization.

Being a dynamic policy space, NLP incorporates data-driven decision support mechanisms. The same Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS) shall oversee and monitor the implementation of the policy. Moreover, to ensure adequate outreach and effective implementation plans to have training courses on i-GoT. Under the Integrated Digital System, 30 different systems from seven departments are integrated—including data from the road transportation, railways, customs, aviation, and commerce departments.

Breaking the silos of development will help augment the energy and efforts put into projects that earlier suffered from contestation. The groups tasked with envisaging, reviewing, and recommending projects would ideally lead to fewer disruptions and build an efficient infrastructure landscape in the country.

The Center is also preparing draft legislation on logistics with the view of promoting the growth of the sector and replacing the Multimodal Transportation of Goods Act, 1993 (MMTG) with a National Logistics Efficiency and Advancement Predictability and Safety Act (NLEAPS).

The National Logistics Policy largely focuses on the soft components: procedures, regulations, and services in the field of logistics, while the complementary physical infrastructure issues are dealt with by the PM GatiShakti

Master Plan. Whereas the on-ground reality demands an effective amalgamation of the two. The basic infrastructural schemes—BharatMala, SagarMala, Dedicated Freight Corridors, and the like—need reinvigorating as they are indispensable to this exercise.

Unclogging the arteries of trade will especially strengthen the dormant primary and secondary sectors, unlocking their potential. By addressing the skewed modal share, increasing fuel efficiency, achieving a high operational ratio, and incorporating innovation, the woes of India's transport sector can be confronted.

Conclusion

The challenges of New India are multifold, the GatiShakti plan and NLP come at a critical juncture when the Indian population is young, industries are developing, and disruptive technologies are becoming mainstream. In the backdrop of changing demographics and the environment, convergent infrastructure development in a multitude of facilities is imperative. The *raison d'être* for improvement and augmentation of infrastructure delivery across the spectrum, from the provision of housing to water and sanitation to trade and commerce to digitalization, is compelling. A multi-sectoral approach to infrastructure development acknowledges the fluidity of physical infrastructure in today's interconnected world.

As infrastructure acts as an enabler for growth, for India to become a 5 trillion dollar economy, creating and upgrading existing infrastructure acts as a catalyst. The newly unveiled National Logistics Policy acts as the perfect wingman to the National Master Plan-GatiShakti, for making India realize her true potential as a world leader in infrastructure and logistics. A progressive easing of the business environment coupled with economic reforms will boost competitiveness and productivity. The GatiShakti and the Logistics policy both lay the foundation of synchronous decision-making for creating a world-class, seamless multi-modal transport network, on the back of which India is poised to become a developed nation.

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Indo-Pacific Economic Framework: Old Wine in New Bottle?

Samriddhi Sharma and Satyam Tripathi

Abstract

The launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) for prosperity by the United States' President Joe Biden on May 23, 2022, from Tokyo, reflects the recuperation of the US's geo-economic initiative surfing onboard the multilateral platform within the geo-political construct i.e., Indo-Pacific, after five years since Donald Trump pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017. It has stirred the already complex complicated multilateral, minilateral and bilateral state of affairs in the region.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific; Geo-politics; India; China; Trade

India's engagement in the region

After a number of China's assertive actions since 1974 with the claiming of Paracel islands and later passing a territorial sea law allegedly claiming the entire South China Sea citing historical reasons, a decade after the establishment of the United Nations Convention on the Law of Seas (UNCLOS), created skepticism and a sense of fear among Southeast Asian states.

In order to counterbalance China's dominance in the region, South-East Asian states initiated a 'Look West' outlook where India was perceived as a natural balancer to China. Lee Kuan Yew, Former Prime Minister of Singapore had once said,

"There will be the US, there will be China, the Indians are going to be themselves, they're not going to be everybody's lackey."

It was in 1994 that India reciprocated by officially launching the 'Look East' policy with its core idea of integration of the Indian economy with that of ASEAN. Given the Indo-Pacific's historic importance with more than 50% of world trade taking place in the region, India realized this potential only with the liberalization of its economy in the 1990s. In 2018, PM Modi outlined India's vision for the Indo-Pacific region at the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore. Subsequently, in April 2019, an Indo-Pacific division was established by MEA bringing within its ambit ASEAN, IORA, and QUAD.

The US under Donald Trump had largely been reluctant and retracting from committing to multilateral institutions under the domestic pressure of protectionist

nationalism, and hence mostly remained occupied with bilateral deals. TPP, first conceived by Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama under his "Pivot to Asia" strategy, was aimed to contain China's growing economic clout in the region. The withdrawal revived the end of the multilateralism debate, more importantly after the Covid-induced pandemic, posing a question on the multilateralist world order on its ability to ensure stability and cooperativeness when every country was looking inward or at most having a bilateral gaze.

A multi-layered web of relationships

The IPEF contains, but is not limited to, trade that forms one of its four pillars on which India abstained from going on board. But this abstention does not mean the end of India's engagement with the initiative. India's vision of Indo-Pacific and Act East Policy has ASEAN at its central premise. This holds significance since IPEF as of now is joined by all ASEAN countries except Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar.

Figure 1 shows ASEAN's bilateral trade with China, the US, and India in USD Billions as of 2021.

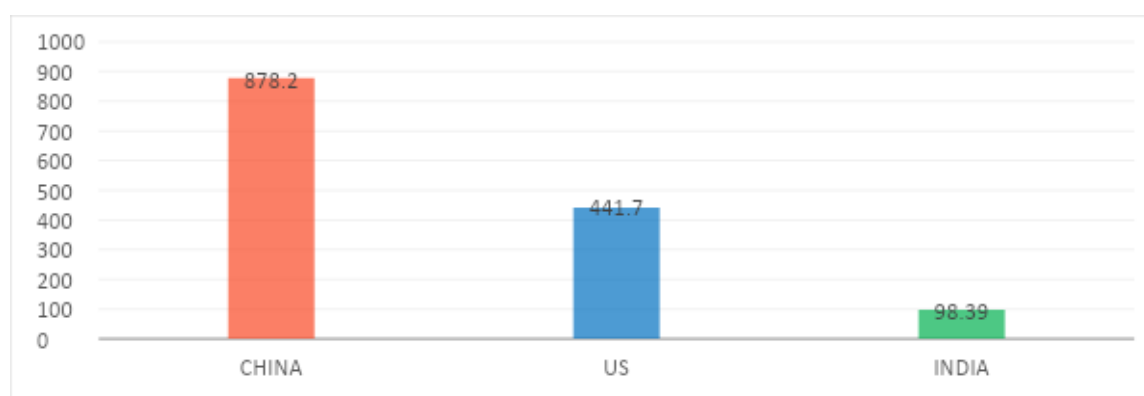


Figure 1

Source: [Chinese Embassy in Brunei](#), [US Department of State](#) and [Ministry of External Affairs](#)

The above graph affirms the fact that China remains the largest trading partner for ASEAN and the long way ahead for India to take the lead in the region.

RCEP and IPEF: A bipolar Tug-of-War

The 15-member Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) contains all ten members of ASEAN. It remains the world's largest FTA trading bloc with 30% of the global GDP. India opted not to be part of the economic integration, given its ill-at-ease when seen in terms of trade deficit, conspicuously with China. RCEP accounts for more than 30% of China's trade volume and is thus perceived largely as its sphere of influence from the west's perspective.

RCEP is necessarily an FTA that aims to reduce 90% of import tariffs within 20 years, while IPEF negotiations do not involve lowering tariffs or liberalizing market access. The IPEF emphasizes more on rules and policies than market access, giving

it a political tilt as conceived by China. Although, it would be too early to predict its evolution.

All four members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) comprising India, Australia, Japan, and the US are the consulting members of the IPEF whose final framework remains to be negotiated. Both Australia and Japan of the QUAD are common to RCEP, Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and now IPEF. The QUAD forms the frame for US-led IPEF. Two-way trade between the US and the region representing 60% of global GDP stood at \$1.75 trillion in 2020. US FDI in the region as of 2020 stood at over \$969 billion.

The fact that IPEF is not a traditional economic or trade agreement unlike CPTPP or RCEP is now unriddled. This is also evident from the nomenclature of the initiative itself i.e., 'Indo-Pacific' rather than 'Asia-Pacific.' This gives it a strategic fervor. At the same time, quite paradoxically, while QUAD has an informal politico-security nature, IPEF engenders an economic width formally, thereby making sense for Southeast Asian states (particularly ASEAN) that are heedful and wary of antagonizing the People's Republic of China (PRC). This also explains as to why the Republic of China (ROC) i.e., Taiwan was counted out from the initiative despite its willingness to join.

The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) was launched at the 4th East Asia Summit in Bangkok. The seven pillars of IPOI envisage maritime resources; disaster risk reduction; science and technology; academic cooperation; maritime security; maritime ecology; capacity building and resource sharing; trade, connectivity, and maritime transport.

The non-treaty-based IPOI that transcends beyond the security and political conceptions, draws upon existing regional architectures such as Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN-led East Asia Summit framework, BIMSTEC, PIF, etc. India has been an active participant in these domains lately and the US-led IPEF would not only overlap the cooperation areas, thereby increasing coherence but also includes dimensions such as clean energy, access to key minerals, semiconductors, tax evasions, concessional finance, that are key to India as an aspiring regional as well as a global leader.

Concerns

The countries joining the initiative may be divided in future negotiations due to their participation in multilateral Free Trade Agreements FTAs already on the scene and their intersections of strategic alignments. Since the FTAs under the purview of trade do not form part of IPEF, the initiative would not be subjected to Congress. This implies that participants might have to settle with already existing commitments within the laws.

Hence, lacking the legislative substance renders the US absurd in making new commitments for its partners committing to the framework. The framework largely being implemented through the executive order, makes it susceptible to being withdrawn by the new administration in 2024, as happened with TPP. China has an advanced footing in the RCEP and all the members of IPEF are also the part of supply chain and economic integration under RCEP except the US and India.

It would take time and participation, including by IORA states, to decouple from the China-dominated supply chains in the alternate economic framework. The 'free flow of data' model and the climate change pillar driven by the US may put undue strain on the developing economies, in view of India's prospective data protection legislation that points to 'data localization.' IPEF, though at a nascent stage, as indicated by the US, the binding commitments on the trade pillar would not be very appealing for developing countries as it does not provide access to US markets.

Way Forward

IPEF offers an alternative multi-dimensional economic platform to China-dominated multilateral and an opportunity to assimilate the Indian economy in the region which is neither part of RCEP nor CPTPP. As postulated by Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce and Industry in his statement "what benefits member countries will derive and whether any conditionalities on aspects like environment may discriminate against developing countries", India needs to take a leading role as a representative of developing nations in the new economic framework.

India has the opportunity to reinforce itself as an attractive investment destination amidst negotiations on alternatives to China-dependent supply chains. We are also provided with an opportunity to diversify our raw material sources and move past the dependence on China.

There is this perpetual view in China about India bandwagoning with the West. This holds no different for US-led IPEF, but India has demonstrated its strategic autonomy time and again, also taking an independent-neutral stand in the UN by abstaining from votes condemning Russian aggression. For other nations in South-East Asia, New Delhi is more like balancing relations with major powers and so are they.

The US cannot afford to lose India, the largest democracy, out of the initiative given its cultural-diplomatic integration with the region and non-aligning consoling perception for other South-East Asian states. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen reiterated the role IPEF plays in tightening the ties.

There are opportunities for India to harness the potential of the sub-topics like clean energy technology, access to strategic minerals, semiconductors, tax evasion issues, and lead on the same. The final framework remains to be negotiated and officially announced; with China questioning the very existence of Indo-Pacific, what IPEF has in the offing remains to be deciphered.

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Book Review

Seeing the Better City: *How to Explore, Observe and Improve Urban Space*

Charles R. Wolfe, 2016, Island Press, Washington D.C, USA; pp. 263, ₹ 700,
Paperback

Manoj Parmar¹

There are several pieces of literature articulating the need to improve the quality of life within the city by improving its public realm and urban spaces; however, this literature attempts to redefine the same objective but can demonstrate the way forward for advocacy. It brings about the discourse of capacity building in documentation regarding what we like and dislike about our surroundings. We see, observe, and react emotionally or intellectually as urban dwellers. Still, these reactions have the least to do as the way forward with such observations or improving the quality of urban spaces or making policy structure. The art of documenting visual and perceptual compliance is as much an essential asset as any physical or cartographic documentation. Such data sets are unique and can contribute to understanding the urban environment, the interrelationship of society, and the built environment.

The book opens up with the quote from Jonathan Raban (Soft City), "That living in cities is an art, and we need the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe the peculiar relationship between man and material that exist in the continual creative play of urban living".

The book highlights the importance of interdisciplinary aspects of human experience as a valuable resource in making the city. The visual and experiential attributes can contribute to understanding the urban environment and its relationship with society and its people. In that sense, the book sets an approach toward fresher ways of seeing the city.

The built environment has competing interests and presents complex and often contradictory visions. These are usually in a dynamic state and do not allow for singular experiences to set in. The ways of seeing the city go beyond the design domain and planning processes and require a distinct visual sense.

The introduction chapter takes the basic argument about "Why Urban Observation Matters?". The organized two-dimensional controls or regulatory approaches do not allow for complete communication of the reality or day-to-day experiences of the city. The argument was further augmented with classical readings from Kevin Lynch and Malcom Rivkin, who wrote about urban perception as a critical aspect of unfolding the urban experience. This is evident in the excerpt quoted by the author "*Inspirational oral histories, myths and creation stories were rich with imagery and often tried to particular location and landmarks*". The author also writes about the role of human perception in a data-driven world and how human observation is also seen as data that are unique to the place.

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Chapter One on "How to See City Basics and Universal Patterns" attempts to articulate what comes naturally, what could be readily observable, indigenous facets of urban settlements (Jan Gehl & Birgitte Svarre). The process of sensing the city or place decoding requires fundamental questions and processes of documentation. The author advocates better cities are a result of learning how to sense the city first, within which he propagates the tools (Urban Diary) for documentation. The Urban Diary model could be central to place decoding and to locate indigenous roots of dynamic urban reality.

Chapter Two argues on "Observational Rules" learning how to recognize the pattern of city life. The author gives a rich account of the literature, reinforcing the identification of unique patterns of the city. Tony Hiss assembled the book on "Simultaneous Perception" and "Experience of Place" or "Psycho-geography" (probably by Simon Sadler, the Situationist City) or John Montgomery's "Happy City", where attempts have been made to discern how we look at and feel about urban spaces around us. Modern writers like Lewis Mumford and J.B. Jackson often described human-urban relationships as richly engraved into urban history. The framework of seeing the city, as he suggested, firstly, an unconscious search for order and familiarity; secondly, an experience of critical elements worthy of an ongoing look; and finally, discerning a syntax, or a language of form as code.

Chapter Three on, "Seeing the City through Urban Diaries", brings about the importance of representation within the vast disciplines of architecture, planning, geography, and anthropology. The chapter summarizes the traditional approaches along with the Urban Diary, which would adopt the LENS method (Look, Explore, Narrate, and Summarize). The author cites several vital excerpts from the Urban Diary, describing cities to exemplify the connection to place with various types of documentation and interdisciplinary arguments. It also deals with how the Urban Diary can decode the change in everyday life.

Chapter Four on "Documenting our Personal Cities", articulates ways of thinking about 'urban observation' through a personal observation approach. This includes documentation of visual characteristics of urban spaces through various influencing factors such as navigational hints, which bring about naturalness, blending of open and defined spaces, historical significance, and order (coherence, congruity, legibility, clarity).

Chapter Five takes Urban Dairy's agenda forward to policies, plans, and politics. The author states that the city is undeniably a human creation, full of our emotions, impressions, and experiences, while policies and regulatory processes are purely empirical. Accordingly, the need of the day is to know how to re-infuse processes with the all-important attention of human experience and to be accounted for in the planning policies. The subjective ideas and emotional or associative understanding require tools to induce them into the planning processes. The probable way forward is to wed the subjectivity of the city with the urban spaces and its public realm.

Seeing The Better City provides important insights into human experiences from multiple perspectives and, most importantly, deals with the human relationship to cities. This book is a must-read for architecture students working on their architectural thesis research on urban questions and for postgraduate students of urban studies, either in urban design, urban planning, or landscape architecture. The book attempt to help urban scholars, writers, and researchers to articulate what they see and observe various facets of urban life.

Book Review

Cities in Transition

Tikender Singh Panwar, 2022, Dr Arjun Kumar, IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute; pp. 114, ₹ 799, Paperback

Romi Khosla¹

Despite this deep crisis closing in on almost all the cities across the country's urban landscape, many believe that a New India is just coming around the corner, which will be sprinkled with the paradises of smart cities. Whilst some others fear the uncertainty of the future of our normal cities as they decline and decay from neglect. For those waiting for the future urban paradise, they will understand, in time, that the so-called era of smart cities is simply a mirage that has been foisted onto all of us so that we can continue to stay and wait for the good times in the crumbling cities to keep land values at a buoyant level for the developers. Then there are still others, whom we should not forget, who attend seminars and write extensively about how they have broader and larger visions about urban India and how our current domestic urban crisis and neglect belongs to an old way of thinking about cities and how a new era of urbanization is dawning with digital decentralization and how, as the old cities decay, their place will be taken by the formation of new orders of digitized settlements that will spread across the 19th-century urban landscape. This vision applies not only to India but also to the rest of the urbanized world.

Unfortunately, our dreams of a rosy future have been halted in their tracks by the timing of the pandemic that has crystalized even more fears about our cities. It has resulted in uncertainty that has entangled our urban livelihoods, hopes for prosperity, and faith in our future, resulting in a certain amount of pessimism about our future urban prospects. This book, which earlier last year had been available only in the Kindle edition, is now published in the printed format so that a wider range of readers can access it readily from the hard copy version. It looks at that knotted and confused urban future of ours. The author maintains that it is not the smart cities that seem to be coming our way.

On the contrary, a cluster of unpredictable events, such as mass migrations and unaffordable medical expenses, have been let loose by governments that decide and control our cities' fate. These negative trends are complicated to reverse. Urban history tends to unwind in the direction the rulers choose to let loose into peoples' lives. As a result, it is almost certain that we will soon come to a historical place, from where, since we are unprepared, we could face a future of natural and social disasters that will twist our collective urban lives and make it challenging to overcome the risks to survive the century. The forces that continue to complicate the lives of the poor are not being let loose by some isolated black villain.

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These forces are controlled by the elite, who work to divide our cities into enclaves that will safeguard their privileged ways of life. Outside these enclaves, most of our urban population continues to gradually eke out their lives by tolerating the impossible odds while the socio-economic deterioration continues. It's a deterioration in our humanity, social responsibilities, and ethics which ignores the lives of the urban poor and the importance of nature in our cities.

In this book, Tikender Panwar has explored many issues through several chapters illustrating how we could act and realize new possibilities for survival, despite the overwhelming negative trends set in motion by urban city managers' indifferent and callous policies. He has suggested radical changes in many sectors of urban governance in our existing urban cities and ways to clean up the mess while safeguarding our precarious democracy. He suggests, for instance, that the way to move forward can begin simply making a beginning by implementing the 74th Constitutional Amendment. He is no outsider lecturing to us from some remote academic high tower. Panwar is a war horse who has been in the midst of the battles that are being fought to improve and reverse the conditions and lives of our urban citizens who have been marginalized by the "capital first, not human beings first approach" that has been the priority of almost all our governments since Independence.

For Panwar, the city is the hub for participating in a nation's growth potential and dynamic energy. However, as he explains, if all the energy of that force is hijacked by the prosperous in the city, then a majority of the city gets forced to live a marginal life. Urban issues are incredibly complex to deal with simplistically, and almost thirty chapters have been devoted to describing that immense complexity. For Panwar, no magic wand can set the record of many years of abusing the urban poor in one instance. He has outlined multiple initiatives that need to be taken to begin restoring human dignity and lives in our cities. For the convenience of the readers, he has explained, in the Preface, how these complex issues dealt within each chapter can be grouped around some key clusters for taking initiatives such as reforming the administration and management of cities, restructuring the myopic systems of urban planning currently being carried out by experts who are ignorant of the actual human conditions of the marginalized and unauthorized residents, preventing the drifting away in the quality of life in our cities as they slide far away from the Sustainable Development Goals that meet the requisite international standards. He also shows us the ridiculous gap that exists between the actual administration of our cities and its wishful policies and the absence of implementation of those policies. It is almost as if the government announces policies in the air with no intention or funds to implement those high-sounding policies.

The importance of this book lies in the advocacy of a range of suggestions and solutions that are particularly relevant for researchers and policymakers in government who are otherwise seen rushing from one job posting to another, taking charge of our cities momentarily without adequate knowledge of our urban centers. The author has made their job of getting briefed much easier. They can turn to the book and gain a broad 'bird's eye view' of their responsibilities for urban management and steer toward the directions in which the solutions lie. While studying the book, they will also get a trusted and well-researched understanding of the urban issues and problems under their charge.

Panwar, having been in the thick of urban governance, has been the Deputy Mayor of a city that was once the summer hub of the British administration in India.

He describes situations and solutions that have come from his own experience rather than from being derived from some book published abroad or a manual of urban management drawn up by some international agency. Any person reading this book and actively engaged in urban management or administration will immediately recognize, with a sense of familiarity, the way Panwar has identified the complex elements that combine and remain unresolved and continue to perpetuate the series of unresolved crises in urban management. Panwar is not in the business of making theories about our urban situation. He has practical experience, and the problems he has identified in the book come from that experienced background. In our country, it is common for us to find a person who has actively engaged in the urban management of town areas and is mentally equipped to analyze and dissect problems to guide and frame policy issues. Only some urban managers have the intellect and skill to study and analyze problems, using real-life experiences, in the way Panwar has done in the book. This makes his writing all the more valuable for all those in urban management who need an overall and broader view of their problems.

By identifying so many real problems, Panwar has shown that there is a commonality to all our urban problems because they are all rooted in the system of governance common to all cities of our country. At the root of the system is disdain for the poor and a reluctance to improve their essential quality of life, almost as if the caste system is the guide to urban management priorities. Urban problems in our cities are systemic and not limited to just a particular cluster of diverse problems unique to each city. Whether the city is located on the banks of the Ganges or high up in the Himalayas, there are common systemic problems resulting from indifferent management of urban affairs and a neglect of the lives of the underprivileged. Of course, each city has unique problems influenced by its location and social context.

However, during the last few decades, the effort to manage any of our cities properly and for the benefit of its citizens has been deteriorating as politicians have increasingly begun to regard a city as their kingdom to bolster their petty searches for more power.

This political interference in the management of the master planning of the city has resulted in many honest urban managers becoming powerless to do their work. So they seek transfer from their posts instead. It is a vicious circle that has resulted in the problems that Panwar has extensively dealt with in his book. The most serious of such issues, in each of our cities and metros, is the downward slide and slippery shifting towards our towns turning from being good places to live into nasty playing fields where bullying builders and their customers - the wealthy elite, play games with the poor by gambling vast fortunes into urban redevelopment in the high-value parts of the city and suburbs. This is the victor's hedge against inflation. Vast numbers of unoccupied luxurious dwellings, clustered into built-up towers that store wealth, are situated amid idyllic landscapes and golf courses. The winning players of the game are all waiting for the value of the apartments to rise before offloading them to wealthy customers.

Indeed, the city has become the best hedge against inflation rather than being a place where the lives of all its citizens can improve and move towards prosperity. The accompanying polarisation that has resulted from such speculative-centered development amid all our cities has resulted in the bulk of the urban population being disenfranchised and ignored. Panwar has given us valuable insights into the texture of the daily problems faced by the disenfranchised and deprived citizens of the urban centers of India. More important is the underlying warning implicit in Panwar's analysis that we do not have the luxury of time to fix our urban problems.

In participating in the neglect of millions of our citizens, by being indifferent to their suffering and plight and not sharing the fruit of urban prosperity with all the urban citizens, the future of our cities will be very dark and dangerous. Governments must refrain from buying time by distributing water connections and gas connections to the urban poor. The poor need to become shareholders of any urban prosperity and need good governance. For that to happen, we need to read the suggestions within each chapter of the book.

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- The submission should not have been previously published, nor should it be before another journal for consideration (or an explanation should be provided in Comments to the Editor).
- A covering page should be attached indicating the name of the paper, author/s, affiliation, contact address, email address, and contact number. Where available, include ORCiDs and social media handles (Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn).
- The manuscript should contain a clear title and an abstract of 200-300 words, with 3-5 Keywords.

- Word count should be inclusive of references, footnotes, and endnotes, following the section-wise word counts as given above.
- The submission file should be in Microsoft Word, OpenOffice, or RTF document file format.

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The Style Guide is given below:

- The text should be 1.15-spaced, using an 11-point font in Times New Roman, and all illustrations, figures, and tables should be placed within the text at the appropriate points - with proper citation and acknowledgment - rather than at the end.
- Use single quotation marks, except where a quotation is “within” a quotation. Long quotations should be indented without quotation marks.

Spelling and Language

Use American English spellings. For example, ‘organization’, instead of organization.

Abbreviations

Do not use full stops in abbreviations such as MP, MPP, NDP, PQ, USA, and OECD. In the first mention, the name should be spelled out in full, followed by the abbreviation in brackets used in subsequent references.

Italics

Italicize titles of books, journals, and newspapers.

Numerals

Spell out one to nine. From 10 up, use numerals. Use % rather than percent or percent (for example, 10%). Do not use figures to excessive decimal places. At most two decimal places should be reported, with occasional exceptions to this rule, e.g., a regression coefficient of less than 0.005. Millions and thousands should be used instead of crores and lakhs.

Dates

Write out a series of years in full, for example, 1980-1993 (not 1980-93); refer to a decade without an apostrophe, for example, the 1990s (not the 1990’s); for specific dates, cite the day month, and year in that, for example, 25 May 2004. References to centuries are written in full, e.g., twentieth century (not 20th century).

References

- The reference list should include every work cited in the text. It should follow the American Psychological Association (APA) style of citation, and where available, URLs for the references should be provided. The content and form of the reference list should conform to the examples below:
- 1. Grady, J. S., Her, M., Moreno, G., Perez, C., & Yelinek, J. 2019. Emotions in storybooks: A comparison of storybooks that represent ethnic and racial groups in the United States. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 8(3), 207-217. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000185>, Accessed on: March 21, 2020.
- 2. Jerrentrup, A., Mueller, T., Glowalla, U., Herder, M., Henrichs, N., Neubauer, A., & Schaefer, J. R. 2018. Teaching medicine with the help of “Dr. House”. *PLoS ONE*, 13(3), Article e0193972. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0193972>, Accessed on: February 2, 2012.
- 3. Nanda, A. 2011. India’s Look East Policy. *The New York Times*, March 12, 2001.
- 4. Mueller, R. 1990. *Ethics and Dilemmas in Politics*. London: Oxford University Press, p 20-22.
- Do not use et al. in the reference list. Spell out each author’s full name or surname and initials. But et al. may be used in citations within the text when a paper or book has three or more authors.
- Page numbers are required for articles, both place of publication and publisher are required for books cited and, where relevant, translator and date of first publication should be included. Page spans in references should be given in full, e.g. Sedgewick (1935: 102-103).
- Ibid. (and the like) are not used when repeating citations. Simply repeat the original citation verbatim, e.g. (Orwell, 1945).
- Multiple citations within parentheses should be divided by a semi-colon, and there should be no use of ‘&’ within such multiple references. References to works published in the same year should be cited as, for example, (Smith, 1991a, b).
- Multiple citations within the text should be ordered by date, not alphabetically by author’s name, e.g. (Smith, 1902; Jones and Bower, 1934; Brown, 1955, 1958a, b; Green, 1995).

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